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EVERYTHING CHANGED: EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS AFFECTED BY A HOME COUNTRY CRISIS

by

Caitlin J. McVay

A THESIS

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EVERYTHING CHANGED: EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AFFECTED BY A HOME COUNTRY CRISIS

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University of Nebraska, 2015

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The population of international students studying in the United States continues to break record enrollments each year, growing to 886,052 students in 2014 according to Institute of International Education (IIE) data (IIE, 2014b). As these numbers increase, so too do the numbers of students affected by crises in their home countries. These students face a number of adjustment issues unique to their situations, and may require additional support from administrators and others at their institutions. This qualitative, phenomenological study explores the experiences of five international students who studied at two public universities in the western United States while large-scale crises occurred in their home countries. A series of three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant via video chat software over a three month period. The participants were from Ukraine, the Philippines, Iraq, Libya, and Brazil, and were each residing in the western United States while their respective crises occurred. The findings indicated that international students experience a significant amount of stress and that various factors influence their ability to cope and their perceptions of social support during home country crises. Recommendations for higher education administrators wishing to support these students and areas in need of future research were also provided.

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Dedication

To the very first person to share her story of experiencing the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami that rocked Japan on March 11, 2011, far from home, Ao Seko.

Acknowledgements

To the five participants who chose to share their stories and be vulnerable with me throughout this process, I am beyond grateful. I feel so thankful to have met each of you and been able to listen to your stories about an event in your lives that has not been easy or painless. The burdens you carry are immeasurable. I hope that sharing your experiences with me has brought you some comfort knowing that others may learn from them and thus be better equipped to help future international students in similar situations. I wish you and your loved ones all the best.

To my “Dream Team” members, Alexandra Jones and Haley French-Sloan, thank you for dedicating a huge portion of time and sanity to helping me present, discuss, and agonize over this topic. You each listened to me endlessly and provided me with so much support. Thank you also to Mary Nellis, Matt Larcombe, and Kent McVay for reading portions and/or whole drafts and providing feedback, it was much appreciated. To my advisor, Stephanie Bondi, thank you for setting early deadlines and letting me miss every single one of them, and for rereading this thesis countless times. I dare say that I may have *finally* learned to trust the process! Thank you also to my colleagues at UNL and elsewhere for all your assistance and support. To my Montana friends and my Nebraska family, you’ve all been there for me in so many ways, I can’t even begin to thank you adequately enough. I also want to give a big shoutout to my fellow thesising and non-thesising peers, thanks for being in the struggle with me.

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sunshine; I feel truly special to be your roommate. Matt Larcombe, thank you for listening to me rage and stress for the past two years in this grad program. And thank you for moving to the middle of nowhere with me, I am perhaps the luckiest person to have you in my life. I could not have done this without you. To my brother, Jason, and soon-to-be sister, Vanessa, I expect that we each will be calling the other “Master McVay” until one of us decides to up the ante and become a Doctor. Maybe we should have shirts made. And to my parents, Kent and Lori McVay, thank you for always being there for me and constantly pushing me to be better. You taught me how to discover the importance of home by encouraging me not to be afraid to leave it. I know that you would support my passions and dreams whatever they were and wherever they might take me. Thank you for teaching me how to chase after them.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“Home” can be a focus of memory, a building, a way of mentally enclosing people of great importance, a reference point for widening circles of significant people and places and a means of protecting valued objects.

Peter Read, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*, p. 102

For a growing number of students at institutions of higher education in the United States and abroad, the place they identify as home is located in a country far from where they are attending classes. Many international students who attend college in the United States come to a place where the language is different, the people are strange, and the food is unlike anything they are used to eating at home. They leave behind a culture and a people they understand and are faced with the daunting task of learning how to create an entirely new life in the US. To say this responsibility is difficult is certainly an understatement.

But what of the students who face an even more insurmountable task—that of watching from afar as a tragedy befalls their entire country? When a crisis occurs abroad, little attention is paid to those not present in the country where the event occurred. However, many international students are faced with this exact occurrence. Peter Read (1996) captured the meaning of home for Australians affected by the loss of their homes in his book, *Returning to Nothing: The Meaning of Lost Places*. Of particular interest in the above quote is the assertion that home is “a reference point for widening circles of significant people and places” (Read, 1996, p. 102). How are international students

affected by crises in their home countries? How do they react when they must watch their home, the point where their “significant people and places” exist, transform into someplace unrecognizable?

Current events in the world today have the capacity to affect a large number of international students in the US. The year 2014 saw the rise of ISIS, a radical militant group, in several countries in the Middle East, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and a massive outbreak of deadly Ebola virus disease in West Africa. According to the IIE Open Doors data (2014a), there were approximately 86,372 Middle Eastern students studying in the US during the 2013-2014 academic year. Students from Ukraine and Russia totaled 1,464 and 5,138 respectively. In addition, 14,998 students studying in the US last year were from West Africa, 7,921 of whom were from Nigeria, one of the countries most severely affected by the Ebola outbreak (IIE, 2014a).

While these students study at U.S. institutions their well-being is the responsibility of faculty and staff at those institutions. Often, this unique population is forgotten in the aftermath of a disaster simply because they were not present at the disaster site. A flagrant lack of literature on this phenomenon confirms the notion that international students affected by crisis are an invisible population. As such, they may feel unnoticed and even unwelcome on U.S. campuses. This could lead to a lack of retention and a drop in enrollment for students from particular countries, regions, and overall. The loss of the international student population at institutions of higher education in the US would be a significant hindrance to these institutions financially and educationally as this deprivation would result in the loss of countless opportunities for growth and development for domestic students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of international students who have been affected by a large-scale crisis in their home country while studying in the United States. This study will explore the reactions and needs of five international students who studied at two public universities in the western United States during these times. This will fill some of the gap in the literature addressing international students and their needs on U.S. campuses during times of crisis. There is little to no research addressing international student needs during times of crisis, and none specifically addressing indirect exposure to crises that occur in their home countries. This study attempts to add student voices to the literature so as to work toward a better understanding of and increased support for these students.

Significance of Study

In recent years there has been a push to globalize higher education in the United States with the recruitment of more international students. International student enrollment reached a record high of 886,052 international students in the US in 2014, an 8.1% increase from 2013 (IIE, 2014b). Numbers are projected to continue to increase. This study may have implications for how student affairs professionals and others at institutions of higher education respond when crises occur abroad.

Higher education administrators have a responsibility to the well-being of their students and should be prepared to meet changing student needs in times of crisis. Students facing severe psychological and/or financial hardships due to home country crises are at greater risk for poor academic performance (Clark Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Barón, Jr., 1991). These students may choose or be forced to leave their studies before

completion, which negatively affects retention rates. Furthermore, students who are dissatisfied with the institutional climate or services available to them during a home country crisis may also choose to leave their institutions. In a NAFSA: Association of International Educators (2014) press release, the lead researcher of a recent survey on international student retention stated that “poor retention is a function of the mismatch between expectations of students prior to enrollment and the actual experience of students once they are on campus” (para. 4). According to Battocchio, Schinke, McGannon, Tenenbaum, Yukelson, and Crowder (2013), if an institution is known for being welcoming and supportive, recruitment and retention may improve. Therefore, being prepared to help international students who need support during a home country crisis may be crucial to improving retention for the institution and its reputation within the global community.

Research Questions

In order to better comprehend the experiences of this unique population of international students, the following questions were formed to help guide me in this research:

- How are international students affected by a crisis that occurs in their home country while they are studying in the United States?
- How do international students cope with a crisis in their home country?
- How do international students affected by crisis in their home country perceive support at their institutions?

This study was created to give voices to the stories of individuals affected by tragedies in their home countries. Unfortunately, there will always be a crisis somewhere in the

world, and there will always be a person affected by such an event. Currently, there is no available data on these types of experiences. The hope with this study is to allow a few of those people an opportunity to share their experiences so that educators and others may become more aware of this phenomenon and have more ideas about how to respond in the future.

Research Design

Due to the paucity of research studies designed to encompass the experiences of international students affected by a home country crisis, a variety of literature on international student adjustment and adults affected by crisis informed the methodological choices made in this study. According to many researchers (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991; Misra, Crist, & Burant, 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994; Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008), international students typically experience more difficulty adjusting to college than their domestic peers. Research suggests that when international students are exposed to traumatic events such as natural disasters, wars, or sexual assaults, they may experience acute stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other reactions (Schwitzer, 2003). I chose to conduct this study using a phenomenological methodology and a constructivist worldview in order to examine the experiences of a small group of international students from two public institutions in the western US. A phenomenological design was selected so as to fully express the variety of concerns, hardships, and triumphs of international students during times of crisis.

A variety of factors may influence how an individual reacts to a crisis situation. According to Galea and Resnick (2005), different events may evoke different responses.

Individuals with family or friends in the immediate area surrounding a crisis may have stronger reactions to a crisis than those without such ties (Schwitzer, 2003). Due to these assumptions, this study used a maximum-variation sampling strategy in order to explore a variety of crisis situations in five different countries (Mertens, 2010). Because previous studies exploring the effects of home country crisis on international students have either been quantitative (Allen, Marcelin, Schmitz, Hausmann, & Shultz, 2012) or focused primarily on personal traumas (Jones, 2012), this study is qualitative and explores the phenomenon from a large-scale crisis lens. The use of a series of semi-structured interviews and document collection procedures allowed me to build rapport with participants, collect rich, meaningful data, and ensure accurate portrayal of their stories (Creswell, 2014).

Definition of Terms

While exploring the particular phenomenon at hand, I came across a number of terms used both in the literature and by participants. Various interpretations of these terms may exist. Therefore, I will define these terms for the purposes of this research.

Crisis. For the purposes of this research, this term has been limited to only large-scale events which affect a nation as a whole. This definition includes events such as economic or financial collapses, epidemics, genocides, mass terrorism, natural disasters, political or civil unrest, and wars, among others. Although crises of a more personal nature (e.g., death of a family member, loss of financial support, etc.) are certainly important and often accompany the experience of a large-scale event, personal crises were not the main focus of this research. Crisis may be referred to simultaneously as disaster, tragedy, trauma, traumatic event, and so forth in the literature and in this study.

Coping strategies. Briefly, coping strategies are ways of reacting to and handling stressful events. This term will be more thoroughly defined in Chapter 2.

Culture shock. One of the stressors commonly felt by students attending an institution outside of their home country or culture. This stressor is caused by the combination of being unfamiliar with the new culture while missing the familiarity of one's native culture. This will be explained further in Chapter 2.

Domestic students. Refers to students whose home country is the United States attending institutions located in the US.

Home country. Refers to the country where the student was born or raised. A home country crisis is an event which occurs in the country the student identifies as the country where they were born or raised. For the purposes of this research, this cannot be the United States.

International students. Those students studying at an institution of higher education in the United States who identify as being born or raised in a country other than the United States. For the purposes of this research, no legal limitations in terms of immigration status were used to identify this population. In the literature, international students are sometimes referred to as foreign students and may include or exclude those in the F-1, J-1, and M-1 visa categories, refugee and asylee statuses, or legal permanent residents of the United States (green card holders).

Stress. The American Heritage College Dictionary defines stress as:

- a.** A mentally or emotionally disruptive or upsetting condition occurring in response to adverse external influences and usually characterized by increased

heart rate, a rise in blood pressure, muscular tension, irritability, and depression.

b. A stimulus or circumstance causing such a condition. (Stress, 2004, p. 1367)

Throughout this study and in some of the literature, the second definition will be referred to as “stressors.” Stressors and reactions will be more thoroughly defined in Chapter 2.

Social support. The aid or encouragement received from others during times of crisis. Social support systems are often used in the literature to represent specific groups of people deemed meaningful by an individual.

Delimitations

It was necessary to set criteria for inclusion that served as delimitations for this study in order to better define the population. Participants were identified as international students or international alumni who may have experienced a large-scale crisis while in the US by those individuals who sent out recruitment materials on my behalf. As mentioned above, the definition of crisis used in this research was one that included only large-scale events which excluded those events of a smaller, more personal nature.

Once interested participants filled out the introductory survey expressing their interest in the study, their eligibility was determined only by the location of the crisis and their presence in the United States. Participants were required to have been physically present in the United States during the crisis, and the crisis had to have occurred in a country other than the US that the participants referred to as their home country. All participants were also asked to be at least age 19 as this is the legal age of adulthood recognized by the state of Nebraska. No distinction was made between legal status as an international or domestic student, and thus participants were allowed to self-identify as international students.

Limitations

Conducting research often requires the researcher to make decisions which limit the study. Many of these limitations are unavoidable and stem from methodological choices. As such, the limitations of this study will be fully explained in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

As international student populations continue to grow at institutions in the US, so too will the population of those students coming from places in crisis. These international students, who already face a number of challenges just by pursuing an education outside their home countries, must learn to adjust while a crisis occurs thousands of miles away. Higher education administrators need to assess the support needs of these students in order to ensure that recruitment and retention at their institutions remain strong. The following stories of these five participants provide a small window through which to view the experience of an international student affected by a home country crisis.

Chapter 2 will explore relevant literature concerning international student adjustment issues, psychological effects of crises on adults, coping strategies, and the role of support. Chapter 3 will examine methodology including the phenomenological design, recruitment procedures, and data collection and analysis techniques used in this study. In Chapter 4, I will present the findings from the data, first organized into participant stories and then into three research themes. Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of this study's findings in the context of previous literature and offer recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There are very few research studies which address the effects of a home country crisis on international students in the US. Therefore, this chapter explores a variety of literature on the psychological effects of crises in order to provide an appropriate background. First, the typical stressors and reactions to those stressors of international students in the US are discussed in order to establish a baseline of knowledge about what these students endure while adjusting to life in the US. Providing a baseline helps distinguish stressors and reactions caused by a home country crisis from typical ones experienced as a result of cultural adjustment. The next section reviews the effects of crisis as related to the first research question of how international students are affected by crises in their home countries. Literature that explores the indirect effects of exposure to crises on domestic students is relevant to this study as international students experiencing home country crises in the US are experiencing these crises indirectly. In addition, studies that focus on crises occurring outside of the US and the effect on the local adult population in each country address the international component of this study. Then, studies that most directly answer the first research question of how international students are affected by a home country crisis are discussed. The next section condenses previous literature on coping strategies used by adults during crises and is relevant to the second research question on the same topic. Finally, the last section corresponds with the final research question, addressing the role of social support and counseling for international students.

Typical Stressors and Reactions of International Students

Research shows that international students studying at institutions of higher education in the United States typically experience more issues adjusting to the university environment than their domestic peers (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991; Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994; Yakushko et al., 2008). Although most college students must adjust to their new educational and social surroundings to some degree, international students face additional strains related to language and cultural differences (Misra et al., 2003). The additional strains international students face are most often the result of what is known as culture shock.

Kalervo Oberg (1960/2006) conceptualized culture shock as a result of the stress that results from entering a strange new culture and the accompanying loss of “familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 142). These signs and symbols are clues to how people should act in their own culture and are acquired over a lifetime. Oberg explained that these clues differ from culture to culture and the ensuing anxiety caused by culture shock results from not knowing or understanding the signs and symbols of the new culture. He also emphasized that culture shock is a process of steps that most, if not all, people must go through upon entering a new culture (Oberg, 1960/2006).

In addition to culture shock, the literature listed several other stressors affecting international students. Thoits defined “stressors” as “any environmental, social, or internal demands that cause an individual to adjust his or her behavior” (as cited in Misra et al., 2003, p. 138). Stressors rarely occur alone, instead they tend to compile and intensify one another (Misra et al., 2003). Some of the stressors affecting international students are very closely related to culture shock, such as language and communication

problems (Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994), unfamiliarity with U.S. educational methods (Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006), loss of social support systems (Sandhu, 1994; Yakushko et al., 2008), and homesickness (Sandhu, 1994).

Several researchers (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991; Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006) found that international students often impose large amounts of stress on themselves to maintain high academic success in U.S. institutions despite language and cultural barriers. Many of these students were top performers in their home countries and may also feel financial pressure to maintain their academic success so they do not lose scholarships or other funding. When international students with high expectations for themselves are unable to maintain good grades, they often feel a sense of inferiority as they struggle to reconcile their performance with their image of themselves as highly successful and capable (Sandhu, 1994). Clark Oropeza et al. (1991) explained that this scenario represents a change in social and economic status for many students, and this change can lead to “feelings of loss, grief, and resentment” as they attempt to adjust (p. 281). There are still other stressors affecting international students, such as a sense of uncertainty about the future after their immigration status expires (Sandhu, 1994), a loss of identity as students acculturate to the US (Yakushko et al., 2008), and family-related pressures for those students with spouses and/or children (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991).

Reactions to stressors. When international students are faced with these stressors, they may experience a range of reactions. Clark Oropeza et al. (1991) explained that much of the literature covers depression and anxiety as the most common psychological reactions to stressors, but students may also present with symptoms such as

social withdrawal, loneliness, paranoia, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Other reactions may be psychosomatic, such as headaches, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, low appetite, sexual dysfunctions, and lack of energy (Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1994).

Occasionally international students may have strong feelings of anger or hostility and direct those feelings toward others. When non-native English speakers experience stress, English language ability is often negatively affected (Mori, 2000). Moreover, stressors may weaken the immune system and leave students more susceptible to illnesses.

Furthermore, the results of Misra et al.'s (2003) study which examined the interaction of stressors, reactions, and social support among international students indicated that female students experienced "higher emotional (i.e., fear, anxiety, worry), physiological (such as sweating, trembling, stuttering, body or headaches, weight loss or gain), and behavioral (crying, self-abuse) reactions to stressors" than male participants (p. 146). The authors surmised that this difference might represent women's heightened perception of stress and not actual differences, as men are socialized to not display their emotions, whereas women react more openly to negative events (Misra et al., 2003). Yakushko et al.'s (2008) survey of counseling center use by international students found that although many students expressed academic concerns due to stress, more students were concerned with the disruption of their personal well-being. International students may face a variety of different reactions to common stressors at U.S. institutions, but a home country crisis may elevate these reactions to an even higher level.

Psychological Effects of Exposure to Crises

Although international students already face more adjustment issues than their domestic peers, reactions to stress can become even more severe for these students in the

event of a crisis. Schwitzer (2003) provided a framework for understanding reactions to stress and divided them into three levels: non-pathological reactions, adjustment disorders, and acute stress and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). Non-pathological reactions to stress are considered normal reactions that do not impair daily functions. On the next level, reactions to stress become more emotional and may be considered adjustment disorders when the reactions occur over an extended timeframe. People experiencing adjustment disorders may have difficulty functioning at work, school, and home, and may present with depression, anxiety, or other reactions. Adjustment disorders could also occur “in response to extreme events such as catastrophes and large scale traumas” (Schwitzer, 2003, p. 52). Finally, acute stress and PTSD occur in response to extreme stress, such as natural disasters, wars, terrorist attacks, car and plane crashes, sexual assaults, or military combat situations. People with acute stress or PTSD often experience “intense feelings of fear, horror, or helplessness” (Schwitzer, 2003, p. 53). They may experience flashbacks, nightmares, or illusions, and have “strong, persistent stress reactions like sleep trouble, anger problems, or being easily startled” (Schwitzer, 2003, p. 53). These reactions may occur in people directly involved in a stressful event, in those who witnessed the event, or in those indirectly affected by learning about the event.

Galea and Resnick (2005) suggested that “different disasters (e.g., natural versus man-made) and different contexts (e.g., dense urban area versus rural area) may have substantially different consequences” for those affected by the events (p. 108). People exposed to a natural disaster in a small town in Malaysia will therefore have a different response from those exposed to a terrorist attack in London. Individuals in small towns

may have fewer resources and need more time to mobilize a relief effort than people in a large city. In addition, although those who have survived a terrorist attack may have a person or group with which to associate their fear and anger, survivors of a natural disaster do not. Galea and Resnick (2005) agreed with Schwitzer (2003) and stated that terrorist attacks may affect both those directly and indirectly exposed to the attacks. Furthermore, Schwitzer suggested that those students with connections to the geographic areas affected by a trauma (e.g., students who have family and/or friends in the area) are expected to have stronger psychological reactions to the event than those with weaker or no ties to the location. In addition, students who have experienced trauma in the past or are currently dealing with a mental disorder may have more difficulty adjusting after a large-scale traumatic event. Schwitzer's and Galea and Resnick's assumptions about the different levels of connectedness to areas affected by crisis may help to explain the variation in international students' reactions and adjustment.

Domestic students indirectly exposed to crises in the US. One example of a crisis that has been well studied is the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D. C. (Baschnagel, Gudmundsdottir, Hawk Jr., & Beck, 2009; Liverant, Hofmann, & Litz, 2004; MacGeorge, Samter, Feng, Gillihan, & Graves, 2007; Swickert, Hittner, DeRoma, & Saylor, 2006). Understanding how people in the US not present at the site of the attacks were affected by September 11th helps to explain some of the feelings expressed by international students who watch crises occur in their home countries on television and social media. Studies show that many people in the US were affected by the September 11th attacks, even if they were not present in New York or Washington, D.C. For

example, students from a large state university in western New York participated in Baschnagel et al.'s (2009) study on the role of coping strategies and post-trauma symptoms in students. Of these participants, nearly half "indicated that they thought the life of someone they knew personally was in danger during the 9/11 terrorist attack, [and] 10% stated that they knew someone who was physically injured or killed during the attack" (p. 917). Swickert et al. (2006) noted that almost 90% of people indirectly exposed to 9/11 who participated in a national survey reported having at least one stress symptom. The majority of participants in Liverant et al.'s (2004) study of 178 indirectly exposed college students in Boston, MA, were severely psychologically affected by the attacks, and reported feelings of anger, anxiety, and vulnerability to future attacks. These studies give good evidence that indirect exposure to a crisis can be significantly traumatic for those not present when the event occurs.

The study by Liverant et al. (2004) provided an in-depth look into the stress responses of college students in Boston after the September 11th attacks. The results of Liverant et al.'s study showed that "indirect exposure to mass violence results in an initial disruption in core beliefs and assumptions about personal and collective safety and security" (p. 136). The September 11th attacks forced students to suddenly recognize their vulnerability and mortality. These events provoked a severe initial psychological response which diminished with time for most of Liverant et al.'s participants. Personal knowledge of someone directly affected by the attacks seemed to influence participants' emotions and experiences but not their anxiety. These participants initially felt more anger and more involved in the event than students without personal knowledge of someone directly affected. However, their levels of anxiety remained similar to other

participants in the study because they were not present at the disaster site and therefore were not in imminent danger. Therefore, personal knowledge of someone directly affected by a crisis did not necessarily elevate participants' anxiety about their own safety. Liverant et al. suggested that individuals indirectly exposed to a terrorist attack may experience long-term stress for up to two years after an event occurs.

Another study showed that some individuals may experience positive reactions in addition to negative ones after a traumatic event. Two weeks after the September 11th terrorist attacks, Swickert et al. (2006) surveyed students in the Southeastern United States using McMillen and Fisher's Perceived Benefit Scales (PBS). This scale measured the perceived benefits of surviving a traumatic incident in areas such as: feeling closer to community and family, greater compassion, a sense of self-efficacy, and increased spirituality. Even two weeks after the attacks, participants described experiencing significant perceived benefits. This perception decreased over time for the participants. The authors also found a correlation between participants with previous traumatic experiences and their perception of benefits. As the number of previous traumas increased, so did perceived benefits scores. The idea that benefits may be perceived during times of crisis should be kept in mind for the current study, as participants may not always react in negative ways. Instead of feeling depressed and anxious, students may view their circumstances with more optimism.

The role of the U.S. media. Often, international students use a combination of news reports, social media updates, and phone calls to their home countries in order to obtain the latest information about events occurring abroad (Lu, Case, Lustria, Kwon, Andrews, Cavendish, & Floyd, 2007). It is important to understand the role the U.S. media

plays in disseminating information about crises to its audience. In the US, news sources offer 24-hour coverage of events happening all over the world. Young, King, Harper, and Humphreys (2013) stated that the media has been criticized for “overemphasizing low-probability, high-consequence events such as bioterrorist attacks or outbreaks of rare diseases such as Ebola hemorrhagic fever, and underemphasizing more common but less dramatic risks such as stroke, diabetes or stomach cancer” (p. 104). Their study found that if an infectious disease received more media exposure, participants believed it to be more serious and more representative of a disease. Participants also acknowledged that as media coverage increased the likelihood of the disease being a risk to the population decreased. Because diseases such as Ebola virus and Lyme disease receive so much media coverage, participants in Young et al.’s study considered these diseases much more serious than heart disease and breast cancer, which affect millions of people in the US each year.

Holman, Garfin, and Cohen Silver (2014) conducted a correlational, internet-based survey in Boston and New York following the Boston Marathon bombings on the acute stress effects from media on indirectly exposed individuals. Holman et al. explained that “media exposure keeps the acute stressor active and alive in one’s mind” for long periods of time after the event is over (p. 93). The results of this study showed that as was expected, those with direct exposure to the Boston Marathon bombings experienced continuous acute stress symptoms. However, those who were only exposed to the Boston Marathon bombings through the media were nine times more likely to have high acute stress symptoms in the week after the bombings than those directly exposed. In other words, being present at the site of bombings led to experiencing low stress symptoms for an extended time while watching news coverage of the event caused short

bursts of high stress symptoms. In addition, the authors looked for a relationship between the likelihood of having an acute stress response with prior direct exposure to another traumatic event. Those participants exposed to 9/11 or the Sandy Hook School shootings were more likely to experience acute stress responses than those participants only exposed to the Boston Marathon bombings. Those participants exposed to Superstorm Sandy, however, showed no such association with acute stress symptoms. The authors surmised that the nature of the events likely contributed to the difference in sensitivity to stress responses, as the first two events were both deliberate violent attacks and Superstorm Sandy was a natural disaster. This study validated Schwitzer's (2003) claim that people who have experience with past traumatic events may feel stronger symptoms during new crises. International students studying in the US watch their countries' crises unfold via U.S. news sources, so it is important to understand how media coverage can contribute to stress symptoms felt by these students. Although these studies provide clarity on the effects of media exposure on U.S. citizens, it will also be beneficial to examine the effects of crises which occurred outside of the US.

Crises occurring abroad. Literature that covers international crises and the effect on adults in that particular country is useful as this study examines the experiences of international students who are not from the US. Moreover, the experiences of domestic students during a crisis may be quite different from those of people from other countries. Researchers have examined the psychological effects of three international crises on directly and indirectly affected individuals. First, Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon (2003) surveyed the psychological effects of ongoing terrorism in Israel on a national sample of participants. The next study explored the levels of PTSD in Darfuri

women studying at Ahfad University for Women after the onset of the 2003 Darfuri war (Badri, Crutzen, & Van den Borne, 2012). Finally, Main, Zhou, Ma, Luecken, and Liu (2011) considered the relationship between the 2003 outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and coping among Chinese college students in Beijing. This section will explore each study in depth.

Bleich et al.'s (2003) national telephone survey reached 512 participants from various regions of Israel. Just over half of the participants had neither been personally exposed nor had a family member or close friend exposed to an attack between September 2000 and the time of the survey. Of the remaining participants, 113 knew someone killed or injured during an attack and 84 had been involved in an attack themselves. More than a third of all participants experienced at least one traumatic stress-related symptom for at least a month, and participants reported an average of four symptoms per person. Nearly 60% reported symptoms of depression. However, the authors of this study were surprised by the low rate of PTSD in the population. Many of the participants had prior traumatic experiences, which, according to the literature, may increase susceptibility to stress during subsequent traumatic events. Bleich et al. stated that "a majority of participants reported little demand for professional help in dealing with the symptoms aroused by the attacks" and many also felt optimistic about their future and the future of their country (p. 618). The authors suggested that one interpretation of this finding is that "those who experience terrorism may understate their distress and continue with their lives without being affected by it" (Bleich et al., 2003, p. 619). This leads to the conclusion that the Israeli people have become so habituated to stress that it no longer affects them. An alternative interpretation is that this finding is

representative of the normality of the traumatic experience in Israel. In essence, terrorist attacks in Israel have been as frequent and pervasive as to affect the entire population and are so commonplace they are not reported.

The importance of family is evidenced by Badri et al.'s (2012) study on university women from Darfur. In the city of Omdurman, Sudan, more than 80% of 123 Darfuri women sampled displayed symptoms of PTSD (Badri et al., 2012). Many of these women witnessed their homes burned to the ground, their families separated, and/or the violent beating or death of another person. The highest symptoms of PTSD correlated with family loss, home and community loss, and exposure to war-related combat. Badri et al. suggested that "the loss of family is the loss of normality" for these college women (p. 6). Family loss removed an important source of social support and created a sense of vulnerability and isolation for these women. They often relived their trauma alone and felt a sense of guilt for surviving or escaping a fate that befell so many others.

For the population examined by Main et al. (2011), as was the case for Darfuri women in the Badri et al. (2012) study, family represented a social support system for students. Main et al. found that the 2003 SARS outbreak in Beijing, China, affected both those who contracted the disease and those who did not. Chinese university students typically live on campus in residence halls not unlike those at U.S. colleges and universities. This concentration of students is usually at risk for the spread of infectious diseases. Three hundred and eighty-one undergraduate students participated in Main et al.'s study. The researchers discovered that although students with immediate family living in Beijing experienced significantly more stress related to SARS because they had to worry about their families' health in addition to their own, these students also felt more

satisfied with life and had fewer psychological symptoms of stress than students with family elsewhere.

All three of the previous studies are important for the current study. The Israelis from Bleich et al.'s (2003) study showed signs of depression but did not have a high rate of PTSD symptoms and generally felt optimistic about their lives. It is possible that the people who did not answer the telephone survey were those suffering from stronger symptoms. However it is also important to keep in mind that although international students may feel a great amount of stress during times of crisis, some may also feel optimistic and be capable of maintaining their routines with little to no interruptions. Furthermore, both the Badri et al. (2012) and Main et al. (2011) studies emphasized the importance of families and social support systems for students affected by crises. The following section will examine studies that have explored how international students experience a home country crisis while residing in the US.

International students in the US affected by a home country crisis. Although no current studies have focused on large-scale crises experienced in an alternative location the way this study does, there are some related studies about international students and crisis. For example, Clark Oropeza et al. (1991), Dessoiff (2011), and Mori (2000) have very good information on how international students deal with crises in their home countries, but they are not empirical research studies. Dessoiff, an independent journalist writing for the *International Educator*, claimed that international students exposed to crises have more difficulties than what international students typically experience. Clark Oropeza et al. and Mori contain no original research material, and instead are both reviews of previously conducted research. However, both reviews

validate Dessoiff's assertion. For example, Clark Oropeza et al. stated that grieving for the death of a friend or family member "far from home understandably accentuates the sadness" (p. 281). Mori echoed that sentiment, saying that students may experience a tremendous amount of stress while trying to manage a personal crisis away from home. However, these examples are related to personal crises instead of a wider home country crisis.

One study examined the impact of personal crises on international students in the US. Jones (2012) conducted her dissertation research on two students who had lost a loved one in a traumatic way. One student suffered the death of a close friend and the other experienced the weight of geographical separation when her boyfriend joined the Peace Corps. In Jones's study, both participants' stress levels were increased by overly involved family and friends during these times who contributed negatively to their support needs. One student's family actually prevented her from seeing her friend before the friend's death, and the family's lack of support added to the student's stress. Family and friends of the other student "invalidated her experience by telling her, 'You can move on and find someone else'" even though she was not ready to do so (Jones, 2012, p. 79). Even though family and friends were actively participating in the students' lives, they were not supporting the students. The participants in Jones's study both experienced personal, individual crises. Although this provides some information on how crises may affect international students, the current study hopes to examine the experiences of international students affected by large-scale crises.

International students may also experience stress from internalizing the political turmoil in their home countries. Clark Oropeza et al. (1991) said that students may

become so distracted by wars, actions of governments, or the economic climate at home that their academic work suffers. In addition, arguments with fellow nationals over such events can create serious divides in their already small communities (Mori, 2000). A study by Yakushko et al. (2008) which provided data on counseling center use patterns by international students added that international students may also experience negative interactions with domestic students during home country crises. This study pointed out that the political and social perspective of the US toward certain countries can add to the stress felt by international students from those regions. For example, international students who identified as Muslim during the U.S. involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq may have experienced the added fear of retaliation from domestic students. These studies provided interesting data on stress related to sources external to the crises themselves and could be beneficial to the current study as such.

Another study provided quantitative data on the stress reactions of students with transnational ties to a country affected by crisis. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Allen et al. (2012) conducted research with a group of Haitian American adults in Miami, Florida. All 114 participants were recruited through adult continuing education classes at Barry University. During and immediately after the earthquake, Miami area media sources offered continuous coverage, and conversations occurred throughout Haitian American neighborhoods. Allen et al.'s study distinguished participants by their connectedness to Haiti. Forty-three said they had family or friends in Haiti during the earthquake, and the other 71 did not. The results of the study found that those with more connections to Haiti "were clearly distinguished in terms of the magnitude of psychological impact" (Allen et al., 2012, p. 345). The 43 participants with family and

friends in Haiti during the earthquake experienced symptoms such as decreased energy, inability to focus, depression, and anxiety. These participants had strong transnational ties to a country they still considered home. Although the findings of Allen et al.'s study are relevant to the present study as they highlight "the importance of addressing the needs of persons indirectly exposed to a disaster," the participants were all Haitian Americans, and not international students (p. 346). Furthermore, the current study hopes to explore the experiences of international students in more detail than Allen et al.'s quantitative study could provide.

Coping Strategies

Another aim of the present study is to understand how international students cope with the tremendous amount of stress they must endure while dealing with a home country crisis, and how the strategies they use may influence their reactions. Baschnagel et al. (2009) defined coping as "a conscious response or reaction to external stressful or negative events" (p. 915). Main et al. (2011) distinguished between two types of coping strategies: passive coping and active coping. Passive coping includes avoidant or emotion-focused strategies, such as trying to reduce or regulate emotional stress while avoiding the source of that stress. Denial, substance abuse, and emotional support seeking behaviors are all examples of passive coping. Active coping strategies, such as problem solving, planning, and mental restructuring strategies, attempt to reduce stress by focusing on the source, or problem. The use of active coping strategies "has generally been related to lower psychological distress" (Main et al., 2011, p. 411).

Baschnagel et al. (2009) separated emotion-focused coping from avoidant coping into two distinct categories. Those using emotion-focused coping strategies ruminate on

the stress and engage in self-blame while individuals employing avoidant coping strategies attempt to withdraw from the situation. Baschnagel et al. and Main et al. (2011) agreed that the use of avoidant coping strategies resulted in greater psychological responses, depression, and PTSD.

In Liverant et al.'s (2004) study, college students in Boston who used passive coping strategies experienced more anxiety than those who used active strategies. For Baschnagel et al.'s (2009) students in western New York, those who used more emotion-focused coping strategies had more symptoms of PTSD. Women in this study tended to use more emotion-focused and avoidant strategies and therefore were more likely to show signs of PTSD. Baschnagel et al. suggested implementing an intervention to help those students who rely on passive coping techniques to reorient themselves in order to address their more immediate needs during times of crisis. Israeli adults in Bleich et al.'s (2003) study used active coping strategies most often. These strategies included actively looking for family and friends and seeking instrumental social support.

Main et al. (2011) suggested that it is important to note that the literature about coping strategies focuses primarily on individualistic cultural ideals, and may not be applicable to collectivist cultures. Main et al.'s study focused on Chinese students' reactions to the SARS epidemic in 2003. Chinese culture, as a collectivist culture, values group harmony, saving face, and not burdening others with personal problems. Therefore, Chinese students "may prefer coping strategies that involve adjusting to social situations by changing the self rather than the situation," which can be classified as a passive coping strategy (Main et al., 2011, p. 412). Since these individuals may be concerned with saving face, or retaining the family honor, they may also avoid seeking

support from others. Contrary to the previous literature, the results of Main et al.'s study showed students adjusted better under stress when using any coping strategy, and not just active coping strategies. The authors therefore suggested that instead of relying solely on one coping strategy, Chinese students may want to employ many different strategies in order to cope best under stress (Main et al., 2011).

Supporting International Students in Times of Crisis

As previously mentioned, a major component of culture shock is the loss of familiar social supports. Much of the literature stressed the importance of social support structures (Jones, 2012; Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008). International students sacrifice an established support group of family, friends, and community members when they move to the US and often have to start over entirely in their new environment. Mori (2000) explained that in the interest of mental health, it is imperative that international students establish a supportive network in the US. Misra et al. (2003) and Olivas and Li (2006) posited that the perception of social support may have a stronger influence on students' mental health than the actual receipt of said support. A number of researchers (Clark Oropenza et al., 1991; Misra et al., 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006) advocated for the implementation of programs such as host families and buddy programs that would match international students with other people upon arrival in order to create a support system for all students before a crisis occurs.

The role of social support. The literature shows that in times of stress, international students typically turn to family, friends, or other nationals for support before seeking professional help (Clark Oropenza et al., 1991; Misra et al., 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008). Often, international students seek out others from their

countries in order to establish a support network. Misra et al. (2003) suggested that contact with one's own culture reduced stress for students. However, in instances where international students have very few fellow nationals at their institutions, the subsequent networks may become artificial due to their seemingly forced nature. Unfortunately, this artificial support may not actually be helpful for students experiencing stressors because the support system may not be as strong as if the relationships were formed for reasons of true friendship (Mori, 2000).

MacGeorge et al. (2007) explained that indirect victims of disaster experience predominantly emotional trauma, as opposed to physical or material trauma. Because indirect victims of a disaster are typically not present when the disaster occurs, they do not suffer physical harm. However, they may still feel the emotional effects of a disaster as if they were actually there. Therefore, it is important for students to have emotional support to help protect their well-being. The results of MacGeorge et al.'s study showed that those individuals with emotional support systems experienced less depression. The authors suggested providing indirectly exposed individuals with avenues through which to gain emotional support after disasters in order to manage stress reactions to the events. This can also be seen in Main et al.'s (2011) study; Chinese college students who sought out social support also felt more satisfied with life.

These studies show the importance of social support networks for international students. When students feel threatened, they often find comfort in the company of others they deem to be like themselves. MacGeorge et al. (2007) and Misra et al. (2003) both emphasized the importance of seeking out emotional support from others during times of crisis. Sometimes it is necessary for universities and communities to take a

proactive approach and reach out to students to offer support as soon as they become aware of a crisis. There are many ways institutions and communities may offer social support to international students when a crisis occurs abroad. For example, in response to the tsunamis that hit southern Asia in 2004, the International Center at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor sent condolence emails to students from countries most affected by the disaster (Lipka, Karen, Cohen, & Neelakantan, 2005). In addition to offering extended counseling hours following the crisis, the university planned remembrances and other events to aid students during this time. The Sri Lankan Student Association at Arizona State University organized a relief effort to collect money, clothes, and medical supplies and help rebuild homes in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami (Lipka et al., 2005).

After the devastating earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, Northcentral Technical College (NTC) worked with the local community to support students affected by the crisis (Dessoiff, 2011). Host families in the area not only helped students financially, but served as emotional support for Haitian students affected by “a pervasive sense of guilt” about being safe in the US while their families and friends were suffering back home (Dessoiff, 2011, p. 53). Community members helped provide meals for distraught students and kept them busy so as to keep students’ minds off the disaster. The present study will examine participants’ relationships with universities, community members, and other nationals to determine how international students sought and/or received support during times of crisis. Although social support systems are clearly beneficial for international students, sometimes a more formal approach such as counseling is necessary.

Counseling. International students who are experiencing a home country crisis may not be able to handle the situation on their own and could benefit from the use of counseling services. Understanding the reasons why these students typically underuse counseling services can help professionals to better serve their students in times of crisis. The following sections will outline counseling center use patterns and provide suggestions for alternative options for international students.

The literature overwhelmingly shows that international students underuse counseling services in the US (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994; Yakushko et al., 2008). In fact, during the five-year period at the Midwestern university studied by Yakushko et al. (2008), only 1.8% of all enrolled international students sought help from counseling services. Students from Asia and the Pacific Islands represented the largest percentage of this group as would be expected due to the national trend of a large proportion of international students from these areas. Many of the international students in Yakushko et al.'s study attended fewer than five sessions. The most common way international students terminated their counseling relationships was by not showing up for an appointment, and 70% percent of those no-shows "did so after a single counseling session" (Yakushko et al., 2008, p. 11).

The literature listed many different explanations for this type of behavior from international students. Perhaps the most common barrier was noted by participants in Jones's (2012) study who associated a negative stigma with the use of counseling services. These students were ashamed of seeking counseling and actually wished to hide their use of these services (Jones, 2012). Mori (2000) and Sandhu (1994) both corroborated the existence of a negative stigma attributed to counseling services.

International students may be afraid for many reasons, including fears of being labeled as mentally ill (Sandhu, 1994) or being sent home to their countries for using such services (Mori, 2000). Several researchers (Clark Oropenza et al., 1991; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994) explained that international students may underuse counseling simply because they are unaware of or unfamiliar with services available to them on campus. In addition, the cultural differences in basic beliefs about mental health (Mori, 2000) and the “variations in expression, labeling, and acceptance of ‘abnormal’ behavior” may create insurmountable barriers between international students and their use of counseling services (Clark Oropenza et al., 1991, p. 282).

Sandhu (1994) claimed that international students rarely seek counseling services on their own and may need to be referred to such services. Yakushko et al.’s (2008) study confirmed this, as nearly half of the small number of students who chose to attend counseling services indicated they had been referred. Even if they receive a referral to counseling, some students may resist seeking help from such a service. Schwitzer (2003) and Olivas and Li (2006) suggested using alternative approaches in an effort to reach all students during a crisis. For example, instead of offering traditional counseling sessions, institutions may wish to give lectures, hold discussions, or offer workshops in alternative settings such as dining halls, residence halls, and student organization meetings.

Yakushko et al. and Schwitzer explained that other staff at the university such as resident assistants, academic advisors, and student services staff should be trained to recognize when a student is having trouble handling a home country crisis. Other researchers (Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Sandhu, 1994) emphasized the importance of offering cultural sensitivity training to these professionals so that they may be better equipped to

assist international students. Displaying informational posters and passing out brochures after a crisis may encourage students affected by a crisis to seek assistance. The main point of offering these additional services is to be highly accessible to students and members of the community in need of psycho-emotional support (Schwitzer, 2003). At the very least, these efforts will help let students from countries in crisis know that the events in their countries have been recognized and are not being ignored.

Conclusion

The literature that informs this study comes from a variety of areas. In order to understand how an international student experiences a home country crisis while studying in the US, one must first understand how international students differ from domestic students with regard to stress and adjustment to university life. The literature suggests that students affected by crisis face even more stress than those who have never experienced such an event. When students are stressed, they rely upon a variety of coping strategies and support systems. However, no empirical research studies address how international students cope and find support when a crisis occurs in their home countries. Furthermore, if higher education professionals wish to better serve these students, they must try to understand their stories. This study attempts to explore these stories in depth to provide clarity on how international students are affected, how they cope, and how they navigate support systems during times of crisis. The previous literature has directly influenced the research questions and many of the methodological choices made in this research study. The following chapter will explain those methodological choices and their significance to the study in detail.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Qualitative Research

This is a qualitative study which attempts to make meaning of the lived experiences of international students studying in the United States while a crisis occurs in their home countries. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). According to Mertens (2010), qualitative researchers interpret phenomena from the perspective of people who live them. Qualitative methods offer the researcher an opportunity to explore and understand a situation in depth using a small number of individuals. Often, qualitative researchers gather data from the participants’ natural environments and use inductive logic to allow meaning to emerge from the data rather than fitting the data into predetermined categories (Mertens, 2010).

In order to understand this research study, one must understand the worldview from which the researcher operates. I hold a constructivist worldview. Constructivists believe that “knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and that researchers should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Mertens, 2010, p. 16). Constructivists strive to understand the realities of their participants and recognize that reality is socially constructed and differs among individuals. Constructivism developed from German philosophers’ study of hermeneutics, or the study of interpretive meaning (Mertens, 2010). Researchers who operate from the constructivist worldview see hermeneutics “as a way to interpret the meaning of something from a certain standpoint or situation”

(Mertens, 2010, p. 16). Creswell (2014) added that constructivists acknowledge that their interpretation of participant realities is shaped by the researcher's "personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (p. 8). The goal of constructivist research, therefore, is to seek an understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the participant as much as possible while understanding that the researcher's background will affect the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010).

Phenomenology

This study used a phenomenological design in an effort to focus on the subjective experiences of the individuals participating in the research. Mertens (2010) explained that the "key characteristic of phenomenology is the study of the way in which members of a group or community themselves interpret the world and life around them" (p. 235). Phenomenological designs come from philosophy and psychology (Creswell, 2014). The researcher is charged with constructing "a rich, detailed description of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p. 66). For the participants in this study, the shared phenomenon is the experience of studying in the United States while a crisis occurs at home. Phenomenological studies typically utilize a participant pool of three to ten individuals and qualitative interviews to develop a description of the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Lester (1999) suggested that phenomenological methods provide "minimum structure and maximum depth" in the collection and interpretation of data (p. 2). In order to obtain in-depth data, it is important for the researcher to establish rapport and empathy with the participants (Lester, 1999). Therefore, I chose to use a series of in-depth qualitative interviews in order to build relationships with participants and allow them time to become more comfortable during the research process. In

addition, I offered participants the opportunity to review interview questions beforehand and write about their experiences if they wished so that those participants who may have been uncomfortable with the English language felt adequately prepared to discuss their experiences. I chose to provide this opportunity partly to allow my participants, who were all English language learners, more time process the questions and also to allow multiple avenues of expression for students who may have preferred a written method over a verbal one. If any participants chose to create written responses to interview questions, these documents were collected with permission to help me understand participant experiences more fully. Although only one participant chose to provide written materials, many of the participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to review questions before the interviews as this allowed them to refresh their memories on their most impactful experiences prior to being interviewed.

Recruitment and Participants

The participant population includes international students and alumni of U.S. institutions of higher education who were living in the US when large-scale crises occurred in their home countries. All participants were over the age of 19 at the time of recruitment. Participants were recruited from three institutions in the US with the help of staff in international student offices. The three institutions, henceforth referred to by pseudonyms, were as follows: Sunny State University: a large public institution in the western US, Central University: a large public institution in the Midwest, and the University of the Rivers: a medium-sized public institution in the western US. Recruitment materials were emailed to international student advisors at each institution in early November 2014. At Sunny State University, a staff member emailed the

recruitment message to 72 Libyan and Iraqi students directly as well as advertised the study to the larger international student body through a weekly newsletter. At Central University, the recruitment materials were emailed to 17 students and alumni deemed qualified for the study by an international student advisor. International student advisors at the University of the Rivers contacted one student and one alumnus. In addition, the recruitment materials were posted to the NAFSA discussion board which is accessed by professionals who work with international students across the US and Canada.

Maximum-variation sampling was used to select five participants from a pool of nine who expressed interest in the study. Mertens (2010) described maximum-variation sampling as a strategy in which participants are chosen based on “maximizing variation within the sample” (p. 321). This strategy allowed me to describe both the uniqueness of each situation as well as the commonalities expressed by participants from different countries. Participants for this study were chosen from different countries and institutions wherever possible. Initially, nine volunteers contacted me via email or by filling out the introductory survey. One person who contacted me through email did not follow up by filling out the introductory survey, and so did not participate in the remainder of the study. Only 1 of 8 volunteers who filled out the survey was deemed ineligible for the study as this person was not present in the US when the crisis occurred, and for this study I was interested in people who were in the US at the time of the crisis. I contacted the other seven to set up an interview. After three days, any students who had not replied were sent a reminder email. Ultimately, two students were excluded from the study as they did not respond to any emails.

In-depth participant profiles will be provided in the next chapter. Provided below in Table 1 is a summary of demographic information including participants' pseudonyms, country of origin, age, sex, educational level, and amount of time spent in the US prior to the occurrence of each crisis:

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Country	Age	Sex	Ed. Level	Time in US
Anna	Ukraine	23	Female	Masters	3 months
Cristina	Philippines	28	Female	Masters	~10 years
Mohammed	Iraq	26	Male	Masters	6 months
Om Manar	Libya	40	Female	Doctorate	~2 years
Pedro	Brazil	20	Male	Bachelors	0

Research Sites

I chose three institutions to send out recruitment materials on my behalf. I chose these institutions because I had personal contacts who work with international students at those institutions. Participants of this study were enrolled at only two of those institutions. There were no participants from the third institution, Central University. A short description of each of the other institutions follows:

Sunny State University. Sunny State University (SSU) is located in a mid-sized city in the western US. It is a large, public, research institution. As of Fall 2014, SSU had a total enrollment of about 25,000 students on campus. There were 20,000 undergraduate students, 4,000 graduate students, and 500 professional students. International students totaled between 1,500 and 2,000. Three of the five participants in this study were current students at SSU.

University of the Rivers. The University of the Rivers (UR) is a medium-sized, public, research institution located in a small city in the western US. Total enrollment as of Fall 2014 for the University of the Rivers system, which includes one main campus, two smaller campuses, and three technical colleges, was about 15,000 students. Of those, about 10,000 students studied at the main campus. Between 500 and 1,000 international students were enrolled at the main campus in the Fall 2014 semester. One of the participants in this study was a current student at UR and one was an alumnus.

Methods of Data Collection

I used Google Forms to create an introductory survey to gather contact information and initial data from potential participants. In the recruitment materials, interested persons were directed to click on a link to fill out a survey so that I could determine whether they qualified for the study. Those participants deemed qualified for the study were contacted by email with the informed consent document and asked to schedule a time for the first interview.

In addition to the initial information collected with the introductory survey, data was collected through two procedures commonly used in qualitative research: interviews and document collection. Creswell (2014) described qualitative interviews as consisting of “generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 190). Mertens (2010) explained that qualitative interviews “get the full range and depth of information” (p. 352). Many qualitative studies use unstructured or semi-structured interview formats which allow the researcher to build rapport with the participants. By building relationships with each participant, I was able to gather rich, meaningful data. Using such informal strategies also allows for

more flexibility in the interview so that the “respondent’s concerns and interests” may be explored in more depth rather than focusing only on what the researcher has deemed relevant prior to the interview (Mertens, 2010, p. 371).

In addition, Creswell (2014) suggested collecting qualitative documents during the research process. These may be journals kept by the researcher, journals kept by participants, personal letters from participants, public documents, or others. Journals kept by participants are particularly useful as they represent “data to which the participants have given attention” (Creswell, 2014, p. 192). Mertens (2010) explained that document collection helps the researcher obtain background information that may be discussed in less depth during interviews. Although this strategy for data collection when used singularly is limited (since a researcher can only collect data that already exists), collection of documents can complement the data gleaned during qualitative interviews (Mertens, 2010).

This study utilized a series of three semi-structured interviews and document review. I chose to conduct all interviews via Skype or Google Hangout for convenience reasons for both myself and the participants. In order to provide a confidential environment for the participants, interviews were conducted from a private room in my personal residence or in a private office after business hours where conversations could not be overheard or seen. Participants were emailed the questions for each interview ahead of time and encouraged to prepare for the interviews in any way they wished. The first two interviews consisted of 10 and eight questions respectively and lasted between 25 and 75 minutes each. The third interview was a follow-up interview which allowed participants to clarify any material from the previous two interviews or add any

remaining thoughts. The follow-up interviews lasted between six and 20 minutes. Two participants chose not to complete the follow-up interview via Skype or Google Hangout, and instead sent their thoughts through email or Google Chat. After each interview, I asked participants to provide any written materials such as journals or written answers to interview questions to help with data analysis if they wished to do so. I received written materials from only one participant, which I used to clarify that participants' verbal responses to interview questions. In addition, I kept notes during each interview and wrote a summary immediately after in order to capture overarching themes and thoughts as well as comments to remind myself of any potential biases that emerged during the data collection phase. These documents served as a guide when I conducted the data analysis phase.

Data Analysis

I began transcribing the first two rounds of interviews prior to finishing the data collection phase. A majority of the transcription took place after the first two interview rounds were completed. I used Microsoft Word and a free transcription software to transcribe the interviews. Before scheduling the follow-up interviews, I engaged in an initial coding phase to allow major themes to emerge naturally from the data. Creswell (2014) described coding as a process that:

Involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often a term based in the actual language of the participant (called an *in vivo* term). (p. 198; emphasis in original)

During this process, I first read through several transcriptions making notes in the margins about the overall meaning of each section. I then compiled a list of notes and organized these categories into six themes. Then I returned to the transcriptions and highlighted passages using a focused coding strategy with the six themes. After compiling some initial thoughts, I sent a draft of the findings to the participants for review and scheduled a final follow-up interview with each to discuss any thoughts or concerns. The follow-up interviews were transcribed and added into the coding as they were completed. One participant provided clarification on an event which was misrepresented in the initial document. The same participant also provided new information on his experience elicited from reading the experiences of other participants. These and other data were incorporated into the final themes and participant stories.

While developing the third research theme, I found it beneficial to draw maps of participants' emotional and stress reactions. These maps represented my interpretation of participants' stress levels as shown over time. The timeline varied for each participant, as some crises occurred over only a few months and others continued for several years beyond the initial events. Included in these stress maps were different events identified as stressors by participants which caused levels to increase as well as stories of support or coping strategies which typically decreased stress levels. After completing a rough map for each participant, I then compared the general form of each drawing across participants and developed a subtheme of the data.

Researcher Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers often provide a reflexivity statement which is a reflection of "how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences

hold potential for shaping their interpretations” of the data (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). As the primary researcher of this study, I will provide that information now. I am a 25-year-old White woman who has lived in five states and two countries outside of the US. I grew up in a family that not only was open to diversity, but pushed their two children to embrace differences and strive to learn about others unlike ourselves. We have deep ties to our ancestors and celebrate our own unique ethnic heritage as Scottish, German, Czech, and Irish Americans. At a young age, my parents taught me how to be truly welcoming and open to others. On holidays our home was and still is filled with international graduate students who have no other place to spend the day. These interactions helped build me into the person I am today: someone who values and respects differences and strives to understand other cultures. I believe that humans are curious and social beings, and that by investigating and learning about those different from ourselves, we can build cultural respect and understanding. I use research as a tool to satisfy my natural curiosity and learn more about others.

As an adult, I have had the opportunity to live in two other countries. One was a six-month education abroad experience in Malta, Europe, and the other was an eight-month stay in rural Japan as an English teacher. I have been active in the field of international education for eight years, and hope to become an international student advisor at an institution of higher education. Because of my personal experiences with culture shock and adjustment to foreign countries, I am able to relate to international students in the US who may be experiencing the same rollercoaster of emotions. This has allowed me to form a genuine bond with the participants in this study. However, I

acknowledge that my background and personality have also created some biases that deserve to be recognized.

My perspective as a U.S. citizen means that I will never be able to see the individual crises experienced by my participants from their perspectives. Each Ukrainian's view of the conflict in Crimea and the political and civil upheaval may be different, but there is something shared between fellow nationals that I will never quite grasp simply because I am not Ukrainian. In addition, my status as a member of an international office and my interaction with each of the particular international offices at the institutions in this study has biased my opinions of how these professionals work with international students on their campuses. For example, I was inclined to ask participants if they received any explicit support from their international offices or if individuals from these offices reached out in any way. Therefore, in order to portray the stories of my participants in their most accurate form, I have implemented member checks during and after the data collection phase and asked for the assistance of two peer debriefers. More description of how these processes were implemented will follow in the next section.

Finally, I know that upon commencement of this research study, I had my own understanding of how international students affected by a home country crisis were supposed to behave. Although I have not experienced a home country crisis myself, I was significantly affected by a personal crisis during my first year of college. I nearly lost my mother to sudden, severe heart problems, and the thought of that incident remains with me to this day. At the time, I struggled to maintain my studies and almost withdrew from college due to the fear of being away from home if another incident occurred. Some of the assumptions I had about how international students might behave during a

home country crisis came from my personal reactions during my mother's illness. For example, I expected participants to rely heavily on emotional support from others during these crises as I did. In addition, I believed that some students would be reluctant to return to their home countries while the crises were ongoing if the events were particularly violent. This understanding was influenced by the literature on the subject, my personal reactions to the crises as portrayed by the U.S. media, and the first home country crisis story I heard. In July 2014, a close friend told me about her experience in the US after an earthquake and tsunami smashed into her home country. While listening to her story, I felt a deep sense of regret that no professional reached out to her during her distress. I realized that she, like other international students in similar situations, needed support during this time. Throughout the research process, I tried to be cognizant of how these stories affected my interpretation and judgment of my participants' stories.

Ethical Concerns and Goodness of Research

Mertens (2010) mentioned that "ethical concerns direct that researchers explicitly turn control of the interview over to the person being interviewed" and allow the participant "to end the interview at any time, choose not to answer specific questions, raise issues that the researcher did not bring up, and have the opportunity to review his or her comments" (p. 373). This study addressed these ethical concerns by explaining to each participant that they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences before each interview. Participants were asked whether their interviews could be recorded and assured that they could stop the recording at any time. The semi-structured interviews allowed more flexibility for the participants to address issues they

felt were pertinent to their stories. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to review the overall themes found in the data prior to finalizing the analysis.

Mertens (2010) listed five criteria for determining the goodness of qualitative research. Those were credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and transformative criteria. Because this study was created from a constructivist worldview, not transformative, the last criteria is irrelevant. I attempted to address each of these concerns in the development of this study. Strategies I used will be discussed below.

Credibility. In order to address credibility concerns, Mertens (2010) suggested performing the following during the research process:

- Prolonged and persistent engagement
- Peer debriefing
- Member checks
- Progressive subjectivity
- Negative case analysis
- Triangulation (Mertens, 2010, p. 256)

In an effort to engage with participants for enough time to allow for sufficient data collection, a multiple interview format was employed with each participant. The first two interviews lasted about an hour each and allowed participants to tell their stories in detail. The series of three interviews were conducted over a period of three months. The repeated interviews over the course of several months allowed for prolonged and persistent engagement with the participants and the data. I also performed member checks at various times by asking clarification questions throughout the interviews, summarizing participants' stories for review at the beginning of the second round of

interviews, and providing participants with a draft of the findings for discussion during the follow-up interviews. In addition, two colleagues who are knowledgeable about the field of international education served as peer debriefers for this study. They were involved in reading through the initial draft of the findings as well as a second draft which included data from the follow-up interviews. They were sent each document and asked to read through looking for any sections that needed more explanation as well as any findings they considered most pertinent to the field of international education. Their feedback, along with feedback from my advisor, was incorporated into the final version of the research findings. I kept notes about thoughts and potential biases I encountered during the data collection phase in order to understand the progressive subjectivity of my understanding of the research. Furthermore, negative cases were presented in the findings and discussion to illuminate differences in experiences and broaden themes. Finally, data was triangulated between the following sources: interviews, participant documents (where possible), and researcher notes.

Transferability. Mertens (2010) described the keys of achieving transferability in a qualitative context as thick description and the use of multiple cases. Thick description, a term developed by Geertz in 1973, is the “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” of the research setting and participants (Mertens, 2010, p. 259). I attempted to provide this by describing the institutions in this chapter and the crisis and participant backgrounds in detail in the next chapter. This research study makes use of multiple cases as each of the five participants were from different countries and experienced both different specific crises and types of crises (i.e., civil and political unrest, a financial crisis, mass terrorism, a revolution, and a natural disaster).

Dependability and Confirmability. Change is expected to occur in constructivist research, but in order for that research to be considered dependable, changes in research focus should be documented (Mertens, 2010). Qualitative data and interpretations must also be confirmable, meaning that all findings “can be tracked to their source, and the logic that is used to interpret the data should be made explicit” (Mertens, 2010, p. 260). I kept notes during the research process and transcribed all data to provide clear evidence of any and all findings. Additionally, member checks of the findings by participants provided an opportunity to gain confidence that the findings truly reflected their experiences. Participants were asked to review initial and final findings and to suggest ways that their stories might be edited in order to portray their beliefs and experiences more accurately.

Limitations

Research is never without its limitations. Of most prominent concern to this study was the limitation of conducting the interviews in a language not native to the participants. Each participant spoke English with grace and relative ease, however, there is always the danger of losing something in translation when communicating with non-native speakers. Several of the participants expressed a concern during the research process that perhaps I would not be able to understand what they meant by a particular expression or phrase. There were also instances where coming up with the right word to describe an experience was not possible in English. I took steps to put the participants at ease during interviews by asking for confirmation and clarification when needed. If a participant expressed verbal concern about their English skills, I assured them that I could understand their use of the language and that they would have an opportunity to review

the research findings and discuss any discrepancies or concerns before submission of the final document. My background working with other non-native English speakers over the past eight years, and particularly teaching English in Japan, helped prepare me for communicating with the participants in this study as well.

In addition to the language barrier, a physical barrier may also be considered a limitation. The physical barrier here was the conduction of interviews with participants via Skype and Google Hangout as opposed to face-to-face. Although many qualitative researchers conduct interviews in person in order to build rapport with participants, face-to-face interviews were not feasible for this study. None of the participants in this study were located in the same state as myself, and I had no budget for traveling. I attempted to minimize this limitation by forming a genuine relationship with each participant. At the beginning of each initial interview, I introduced myself and explained my background in international education to participants so that they would understand why I was interested in the topic. Throughout the interviews, I expressed genuine concern and empathy for participants as they presented their stories. In email correspondence and subsequent interviews, I asked personal follow-up questions about participants' families, school work, and other concerns they disclosed that were not necessarily related to the research questions as a way of checking in with the participants and treating them like real people with real lives. In this way, I was able to form genuine relationships with the participants and as such learned about their lives and experiences in substantial depth.

Finally, there were a few other limitations created by methodological choices and chance. Because this study asked participants to describe their experiences of a crisis during three interviews over only a short period, many of these experiences were recalled

as memories. Therefore, retrospection may be viewed as a limitation of the data, as participants' perspectives and portrayals of their experiences may change over time. In addition, the students who participated in this study represented students from only two institutions. Although I asked for assistance directly from three institutions as well as from the wider NAFSA community, ultimately, only two institutions were represented. The experiences of these students, therefore, may have been somewhat of a reflection of their institutional environments rather than a representation of their experiences of the crises. Furthermore, the participant pool included four graduate students and one undergraduate student. This chance occurrence means that the research themes developed from the data may provide a glimpse into the international graduate student experience rather than the undergraduate experience.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodological choices of this study. As this is a qualitative, phenomenological study, I relied primarily on a series of in-depth interviews with five participants for data collection. My data collection and analysis procedures have been discussed, as well as steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of this research. Furthermore, I have provided my positionality in this study as the primary researcher so as to illuminate any biases that I may have in pursuing this research. This study also has limitations which have been discussed. In the next chapter, I will discuss and analyze the findings produced by the data using the coding processes described above. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide implications for the field of international education.

Chapter 4

Findings

The main purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of international students affected by crisis in their home countries. This study was guided by three research questions which aimed to discover how international students are affected by a crisis in their home country, how they cope during this time, and how they perceive support at their institutions. The five participants in this study all come from different countries and had vastly different experiences from one another. However, there are also some similarities in their stories. In the first section, I will describe the crises and participant experiences through the eyes of each participant. I have chosen not to use descriptions of the crises from major news sources for two reasons. First, throughout this research, the participants explained how media exaggerates events that occur during a crisis, and so it is difficult to decide what parts of the news stories are true. Second, this research aims to describe experiences of the participants, and for that reason, whether or not their stories represent what truly happened in the conflict is irrelevant because they reacted to those events regardless. However, I did use information from news sources whenever I did not have enough information about a particular sequence of events from the participants. These instances are cited appropriately. Finally, in the second section I will explain the three major themes that emerged from the data collected during this research study. Briefly, those themes are as follows:

1. Crisis in the home country causes a good deal of stress for international students living in the US.

2. International students use a variety of information seeking strategies when a crisis occurs in their home country.
3. International students have to adjust to the crisis and find a new normal.

Before I explain the findings in more detail, I have provided participant profiles which include their descriptions of the crises they experienced.

Anna and the Ukraine-Russia Conflict of 2014

In November 2013, people began demonstrating and protesting in Kiev, Ukraine, after the former president Yanukovych decided not to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union and instead sought to form closer ties with Russia. The political protests continued into January 2014, when the Ukrainian government passed anti-protest laws to restrict freedom of speech and assembly. These laws generated an even larger wave of protests and violence as the police tried to enforce the new laws on an angry public. Many of the protesters in Kiev were killed or put in jail. Some are still missing. Finally, in February 2014, the Ukrainian parliament passed a series of laws that removed the former president and his government from office and established new elections to be held in May.

Then in March 2014, Russian military intervened in Crimea, an autonomous region in the south of Ukraine located on the Black Sea. While Russian soldiers occupied the region, a referendum was held to decide whether Crimea would rejoin Russia or become a part of Ukraine. Although the referendum was conducted under suspicious circumstances and it is unknown who participated in the voting, as a result, the region of Crimea was annexed by Russia. This agreement has neither been recognized by Ukraine nor several other countries. Following this annexation, pro-Russian rebels began

demonstrating in the south and east of Ukraine. Furthermore, in July 2014, a Malaysian airlines passenger flight was shot down over Ukraine killing everyone on board.

Ukrainian, Russian, and rebel forces all denied responsibility for the plane crash.

Moreover, in January 2015 the Ukrainian government implemented a draft to support military efforts to suppress rebel forces in eastern Ukraine. As of April 2015, pro-

Russian rebels have continued to clash with Ukrainian military in two economically important regions in Ukraine: Luhansk and Donetsk. The tumultuous events in Ukraine over the past year and a half have caused stress for a number of Ukrainian citizens, including Anna.

Anna is a 23-year-old master's student from Ukraine. This is her second time studying in the US. She first visited the US as an exchange student in 2011, and she decided to return to complete her master's in August 2013. According to Anna, the violent events that have occurred in Ukraine since November 2013 have affected the economy of the country. Salaries have largely remained stagnant and many families, including Anna's, began to struggle to pay bills and afford food and warm clothes as inflation caused the prices to rise.

When the demonstrations first began in her home country, Anna was busy in her first semester of graduate school. Anna read about the protests on Facebook, so she contacted a friend in Ukraine through Viber, a mobile application, to ask about what was happening. Because Anna's family lives in the central part of Ukraine away from where the majority of the protests were occurring, she waited a few days before contacting her family via Skype. At first she felt angry and upset about what was happening in her country, but since the events were largely isolated in Kiev, she was not worried about her

family. As the demonstrations continued and became more violent, however, Anna's worries for the safety of her family and friends began to build. After the Russian military intervention in Crimea, she started worrying that the violence could spread to her hometown. She began obsessively checking the news and calling friends and family back home to make sure they were okay. Some of her friends had been part of the Ukrainian military and police forces when the demonstrations first began in Kiev in November, and she worried about them as tensions rose.

The spring semester was a tough semester for Anna. She remembered being scared and stressed during this time and her studies suffered. Anna was unable to concentrate because she was constantly thinking about the events in her home country. At times her responsibilities as a student and teaching assistant felt overwhelming. In April 2014, Anna's grandfather passed away and this event added even more stress. By the end of the spring semester, Anna's family realized that she was completely overwhelmed and stressed by the crisis occurring in Ukraine, so they decided to contribute some money toward Anna's plane ticket home to Ukraine. She left the US in May and stayed home with her family for about three weeks, and during this time Anna was able to see the state of her country with her own eyes.

Once Anna realized that her hometown and family had not been affected by the crisis in Ukraine, her anxiety and stress subsided significantly. She realized that the news she had been receiving in the US was exaggerating the extent of the conflict and that very little had actually changed in her hometown. When she returned to the US in June, Anna decided to stop watching and reading the news from all media sources, including

Facebook. She continued to worry sometimes, but after returning home to Ukraine, Anna was able to stop calling home so often and refocus on her studies.

Because the events in Ukraine were widely televised in the US, many people were aware of what was happening and would ask Anna about it. At first, she appreciated that so many people were showing an interest in what was happening in her country. After a few months the protests became more violent, though, and the constant questions served as a painful reminder of events over which she had no control. Even so, many of Anna's friends and professors served as a much needed support network during this time, asking about her well-being and that of her family back home. In addition, Anna felt that the support of her family in Ukraine and that of her two host families in the US helped her tremendously. She was also able to connect with the only other Ukrainian student at her university, and together they gave a presentation to spread awareness about the situation in Ukraine.

Cristina and Super Typhoon Haiyan

Super typhoon Haiyan, one of the strongest typhoons ever recorded, struck the Philippines in the first week of November 2013. Over 6,000 people were killed and 100,000+ people became homeless after the disaster. The Philippines, like many other island nations in the western Pacific Ocean, is familiar with typhoon damage. According to the Joint Typhoon Warning Center's (JTWC, n.d.) 2013 Annual Tropical Cyclone Report, the western North Pacific Ocean experiences activity from an average of 31 tropical cyclones each year. In 2013, five reached super typhoon intensity levels. Haiyan was one of those that reached super typhoon intensity. According to Cristina, a 28-year-

old woman originally from the Philippines, the damage from super typhoon Haiyan was devastating.

Cristina remembered being reassured by family members in the days before super typhoon Haiyan struck that they would not be affected. Then on a Sunday afternoon as she browsed through her Facebook News Feed, Cristina started seeing pictures of the damage and the estimated death toll and she realized that she, along with many others, had seriously underestimated the strength of the typhoon. Seeing pictures of her home country wrecked by the typhoon was extremely difficult. The devastation caused by super typhoon Haiyan was like nothing Cristina had ever experienced before. The majority of the damage occurred in impoverished, rural areas of the country. After Cristina was able to confirm that her friends and family were not directly affected by the typhoon, she felt that she needed to do something to help. That evening, Cristina posted a message on Facebook asking if anyone wanted to donate supplies to her to send to the Philippines. She did not realize that her Facebook post would develop into a full-scale relief effort that would completely consume her life for the next two weeks.

Within hours of asking for help on Facebook, Cristina received several messages from people offering to help in any way they could. The next day, Cristina frantically rushed around her city setting up drop-off locations for donations and taking phone calls from people wanting to help. Her life changed instantly as she tried to keep up with the whirlwind of activity and emotions. Cristina initially felt sad and upset after hearing about the typhoon, but that quickly changed to feeling so overwhelmed about coordinating the relief effort that she was not sleeping well at night.

Cristina's employer and coworkers were a huge source of support during this time, allowing her to take time off from work and helping out by packing up boxes. Several of her close friends also volunteered their time to help with the relief efforts. Even though it lasted for only two weeks, Cristina was relieved when the relief drive was over as she was exhausted from all the sleepless nights and stress from planning and coordinating the event.

In February 2014, Cristina joined several other members of a non-profit on a relief mission to the Philippines. Cristina explained that she felt as if she had been able to accomplish a lot during the tough two weeks of organizing donations for the Philippines, and initially she was very excited to go to the country to help with the mission. However, she also felt apprehensive about seeing the devastation in her home country in person after having lived in the US for nearly 10 years. Being in the Philippines to help with the relief mission was really difficult for Cristina, because even though they were helping people and being sincerely thanked for their efforts, she knew their donations were not sustainable. They were able to provide food and clothes to people in need, but the donations would only last a few days. At some point, the relief workers would leave, and the Filipino people would continue to live in poverty until the next typhoon destroyed their homes again.

Mohammed and ISIS in Iraq

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a terrorist organization active in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Egypt, and Libya, among other countries, captured the major city of Mosul, Iraq, on June 10, 2014. The following day, ISIS militants took control of Tikrit and as of April 2015 they have control of many of the Sunni areas in Iraq. ISIS took

control of these and other cities by force, killing hundreds of people, setting fire to buildings, and freeing inmates from prisons. In Baghdad, thieves and criminals claiming to have joined the fight against ISIS began controlling the city and kidnapping people for ransom. The weak Iraqi government could not expel the thieves from the city because the Iraqi military needed their help to fend off the ISIS militants trying to force their way into Baghdad.

Those who could afford it fled from cities in northern and western Iraq to the Kurdistan Region in search of safety. Many of those displaced were forced to live in tents in refugee camps in the desert. The refugees could not work, so they had to survive with what little money they had until their supplies dissipated. Anyone who could not afford to leave ISIS-controlled areas was forced to stay and suffer in constant fear. These events have caused widespread panic for many Iraqi students and their families.

For Mohammed, a 26-year-old master's student from Baghdad, the reports of ISIS attacks in Iraq initially sounded like everyday life in Iraq. He explained that the living situation in Iraq was bad even before he came to the US in January 2014. So when the reports of small battles in isolated regions of Mosul arrived through Facebook and other news sources in early June 2014, Mohammed was not concerned. However, the entire city fell to ISIS control within two days, and the militant group started taking over other cities and making their way toward Baghdad very quickly.

Mohammed soon realized that the events occurring in his country were very serious. For several days, Mohammed was unable to sleep because he was constantly worrying about what might happen to his family. He started watching the news at all hours, sometimes until six in the morning. Much of what he saw on Facebook and on

television provided a confusing picture of what was happening and the reports often conflicted, leaving Mohammed unsure of what information to believe. He was in constant contact with his family and friends in Iraq to make sure that they were okay.

After about a month of constantly watching the news and worrying for his family, Mohammed felt depressed. Unable to do any work on his thesis, Mohammed consulted his advisor. She was very understanding of the situation and encouraged him to take as much time as he needed. During this time, Mohammed also met with other Iraqi students on campus to discuss the ongoing events in their country. If Mohammed tried to do something outside to enjoy his surroundings, he was unable to do so because he felt guilty for being safe in the US while his family suffered in Iraq. During the first month, Mohammed rarely slept.

Although he was still watching both U.S. and Iraqi news, in July Mohammed began to go outdoors in search of an activity that would make him feel better. When he could not sleep, he would go for a bike ride instead. Finally after two to three months, Mohammed decided to stop watching the news. After that decision, his stress and anxiety lessened considerably. He continued to call his family every day to check in with them, but he no longer felt depressed about the situation in Iraq. The most important thing for Mohammed at this point was the safety of his family in Iraq. He began pushing himself to finish his master's so that he could return to Iraq to be with them.

Furthermore, Mohammed's ability to pay for his program in the US became a problem as he was funded by the Iraqi government. Because of the current conflict with ISIS, the Iraqi government stopped sending new students to the US on scholarships. Those that were already in the US experienced delays in receiving their monthly salaries.

Mohammed's ability to work in the United States was severely limited because of U.S. immigration regulations, and so he struggled with anxiety related to financial concerns.

Because of how much coverage ISIS received from U.S. news sources, many people in the US were aware of the situation in Iraq. Mohammed said that occasionally strangers would comment about the situation to him. He also explained that while he believed that many domestic students knew about ISIS, he did not think they really understood the situation. He saw discriminatory comments on Facebook and YouTube condemning Iraqis and Muslims for supporting ISIS, even though Mohammed had never met a single Iraqi who supported ISIS. Comments such as these made Mohammed feel misunderstood and unwelcome in the US. He explained the Iraqi people had suffered enough and just wanted to live in peace. He stated, "We [the Iraqi people] have a bad government, we have ISIS, we have everything, and we are [caught] in between."

Om Manar and the Libyan Revolution of 2011

In February 2011, young people took to the streets of Benghazi, Libya, protesting against the Gaddafi regime. Muammar Gaddafi, in power in Libya since 1969, was a powerful and feared dictator. These protests marked the beginning of the Libyan Revolution, and a 10-month-long "Fight for Freedom" ensued. The United Nations intervened in the conflict in March 2011, aiding the rebels and establishing a no-fly zone to protect civilians from attack (BBC News, 2015). Gaddafi and several of his children fled to Algeria in August 2011. He was captured and killed in October, and the new government announced the liberation of Libya at that time (BBC News, 2015).

The revolution left the country unstable and the new government was unable to control fighting among local militia groups. When Gaddafi fled Libya in August 2011,

he left stockpiles of weapons in unsecured locations across the country. Many of those weapons came into the hands of civilians, militia groups, al Qaeda, and even ISIS as these different groups struggled for power. The conflict in Libya developed into a civil war. As of April 2015, the fighting continued as Libya's weak government struggled to assert itself over the militia groups.

Thousands of Libyans have been affected by the civil war, including Om Manar, a 40-year-old PhD student. Om Manar obtained a master's degree in Libya in 2003 and worked as an assistant lecturer at one of Libya's oldest universities for two years before she was awarded a government scholarship to pursue her PhD overseas. Om Manar brought her husband and two young children with her to the US in 2008. Her third child was born after arriving in the US.

When the revolution began in 2011, Om Manar had just finished her coursework and was preparing to take her preliminary exam. She checked the news on February 17th, 2011, to see what was going on in neighboring countries, and instead saw reports of gunfire and fighting in her hometown. Om Manar and her husband tried to contact their families immediately, but were unable to reach anyone. When the protests first began, Gaddafi cut off all telephone and internet service in the country in an effort to control communication between rebel groups about the uprising. For months, there was no stable way to contact people from within or outside of the country.

On that day, Om Manar and her husband each created a Facebook account under a false name for safety reasons to try to find out more information about what was happening in Libya. They started watching the news and scanning the lists of dead desperately hoping their family members were not among those killed in the fighting.

After about two weeks, Om Manar finally received word from her brother-in-law that everyone was alright. This was the first contact they had had with family since before the beginning of the revolution.

During the revolution, Om Manar's family in the US started showing support for the revolutionary party. They attended demonstrations and rallies. They took down the Libyan flag from the Gaddafi regime and displayed the flag of the revolution in their window. The university offered separate support groups for women and men and helped them access resources they needed. At the same time, though, anti-revolutionary Libyans in the US started threatening supporters like Om Manar and her family. They claimed that when the revolution did not succeed, Gaddafi would punish those who had not supported him.

The anti-revolutionaries also claimed Gaddafi would stop providing scholarship funding for any students who showed support for the revolution. Although Gaddafi did not stop funding specific students, the UN stopped all money coming out of Libya including the money going to students with scholarships. For four or five months, Libyan students all across the US were not receiving any scholarship money. At Om Manar's institution, administration waived all late fees associated with Libyan student bills, including tuition, fees, and housing. The university also helped Libyan students obtain work authorization for off-campus jobs. Om Manar expressed relief that her university was so supportive during this time.

Finally the US was able to unfreeze some of the Libyan money to disperse to students, and the scholarships began to be dispersed at a normal rate again for about one year. After 2012, however, health insurance and living allowances were removed from

the scholarship stipends, and the money started arriving late. The university still allowed students to pay rent late, but many students faced late fees and charges on other bills. Because of the inconsistency of their funding, Om Manar obtained a part-time job in order to help pay for her education. This added more stress in her life as she tried to juggle being a parent, wife, researcher, and employee all at the same time.

After the revolution ended in October 2011 and the country seemed to stabilize, Om Manar took and passed her preliminary exam. She began to feel optimistic about her country and started working on her dissertation. However, as the militia groups gained more power and the news coming from Libya once again started to deteriorate, Om Manar's feelings of panic began to rise again. Then in December 2013, her brother was assassinated by a gunman after he dropped his children off at school.

This personal trauma left Om Manar feeling completely helpless and depressed. Her academics suffered and she cried every day for months. Because of the situation in Libya, Om Manar felt that if she went home she would not be able to return to the US and finish her degree. She felt guilty for being in the US and not returning home to support her mother and father after her brother's death. Her husband was especially close with her late brother as well, so Om Manar felt pressure to be strong for him. She also wanted to be strong for her children, who having lived most of their lives in the US away from this part of the family did not fully comprehend the loss of their uncle. After what happened to Om Manar's brother, she began to feel as if obtaining her degree no longer mattered. For almost nine months, she felt listless and depressed.

Om Manar's dissertation advisor saw that she was depressed and recommended that she seek counseling. At first, Om Manar felt trepidation over seeking counseling,

but she felt compelled to go because of her professor's referral. Although it was difficult to communicate her feelings in a second language, Om Manar said that counseling really helped. During the weeks immediately after the death of her brother, Om Manar and her family were surrounded by friends wanting to show their support. People from the Muslim community, international students, coworkers, classmates, and professors all reached out in some way to offer their help. Her house was filled with people and food for 15 to 20 days after her brother's death. Some of Om Manar's friends even set up a schedule to take care of her children during this difficult time.

Over a year after Om Manar's brother was killed, she was still struggling with his death. However, the support of her mother and her husband kept her focused on completing her degree. She wanted to finish her degree as a tribute to them and to provide a better future for her children. Because of the events happening in her country, Om Manar no longer felt that it was a safe place to take her children after graduation. She had already extended her program and must complete by May 2015. She explained that she although she misses her family back in Libya, the worsening state of the country and the thought of having to return with her young children to such an unstable place frightens Om Manar. This rising fear of going home mingled with the anxiety of losing another brother or sister in the civil war.

Pedro and the Brazilian Financial Collapse of 2014

In the summer of 2014, Brazil hosted the 20th FIFA World Cup. Teams from 32 countries participated in the games and hundreds of thousands of people flooded into 12 different cities in Brazil to watch (Koba, 2014). According to an article in CNBC's Nightly Business Report, just before the beginning of the tournament it was estimated

that Brazil would spend over \$11 billion in preparations for the World Cup (Koba, 2014). Brazil is also set to host the 2016 Olympics which promises to cost the country even more money. These expenditures coupled with a rising inflation rate and lack of international investors have the potential to seriously damage Brazil's economy.

A Brazilian financial collapse could have vast consequences for the over 13,000 Brazilian students studying in the US (IIE, 2014c). Pedro, one of about 150 exchange students with the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program at his institution, worried about what a financial and economic collapse might mean for the future of his country. Pedro gradually became aware of the problems with the Brazilian economy from both U.S. and Brazilian media sources while still in Brazil. He arrived in the US in June 2014, and began to worry that if the Brazilian economy continued to worsen, many low-income families would lose their jobs. If these people lost their jobs, he worried that they would not be able to support and feed their families.

After Pedro arrived in the US, news of a corruption scandal rocked the country. The Brazilian oil company Petrobras was accused of embezzling billions of dollars and giving kickbacks to major politicians in the country. Several executives of the company resigned amidst extensive investigations (Barnato, 2014). The scandal even threatened to mar the reputation of President Dilma Rousseff, who only narrowly won reelection last fall (Barnato, 2014).

As of January 2015, Pedro's family and friends had not been directly affected by the economic downturn in Brazil. However, Pedro explained that he worried he might not be able to afford his tuition on his own when he returns to Brazil or find a job when he graduates. The Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program paid for all of his expenses

while he has been studying in the US. Without this funding, Pedro could not afford to stay in the US. He worried that if the economy continued to worsen, the program would cancel his scholarship, and he would be forced to go home. He was uneasy about the prospect of returning to Brazil because he had grown accustomed to life in the US and knew that readjusting to life in Brazil would be difficult for him.

Pedro felt frustrated by the financial collapse in Brazil because he was very proud of the progress his country had made and did not want to see the country regress. Perhaps even more frustrating, though, were encounters with other Brazilians who did not agree with Pedro's point of view. Many of the other Brazilian students who Pedro spoke to either wanted to ignore the problem entirely or argue with him. Some students told him that he was overreacting, and Brazil's problems would disappear. Pedro felt that the problems in his home country were so blatantly obvious that they were impossible to ignore. It was difficult for him because he felt as if he was the only person taking Brazil's issues seriously. Pedro has had some support in the form of a few close friends and family members who were also concerned about the situation in Brazil. However, most of the time he felt unacknowledged and unsupported by his fellow Brazilians.

Research Themes

In this section, I will discuss three themes that developed out the data collected from interviews and document collection procedures. These themes address each of the research questions. The first two themes, *crisis in the home country causes a good deal of stress for international students living in the US*, and *international students use a variety of information seeking strategies when a crisis occurs in their home country*, address the first research question: how international students are affected by a crisis in

their home country. The third theme, *international students have to adjust to the crisis and find a new normal*, addresses both the second and third research questions: how do international students cope with crisis and how do they perceive support during a crisis.

Table 2 outlines the themes and subthemes below.

Table 2

Research Themes and Subthemes

Theme 1	Crisis in the home country causes a good deal of stress for international students living in the US.		
Subthemes	Family and Personal Pressures	Financial Pressures	Pressures from Others
Theme 2	International students use a variety of information seeking strategies when a crisis occurs in their home country.		
Theme 3	International students have to adjust to the crisis and find a new normal.		
Subthemes	Institution and Population Size, Crisis Visibility, and Relationships	The Process of Coping	

Theme 1: Crisis in the home country causes a good deal of stress for international students living in the US. Participants in this study expressed a variety of struggles they faced while dealing with a home country crisis. This theme has been divided into three subthemes which represent the different factors influencing participants' stress levels. These are *family and personal pressures*, *financial pressures*, and *pressures from others*. Family and personal pressures included stress related to having family in the areas affected by the crisis. Financial pressures included the loss or unreliability of scholarships, the effects of the home country economy on families' financial situations, and the need to work part-time to maintain personal finances. Finally, pressures from others included stressful interactions with other people not

directly related to the crisis, such as hostile relationships with fellow countrymen, experiences of discrimination, or encounters with insensitivity from others.

Subtheme 1.1: Family and personal pressures. Because the participants had a personal connection to the country where the crisis occurred, many of them experienced stress from personal factors. Having family in the location of the crisis accentuated the stress felt by participants. Worries related to family and personal issues had a close relationship to the participants' senses of self. These pressures were often not caused by any identifiable source, and were instead a product of the conflict itself and its occurrence in the participants' home country. Home to these participants was a country, a region, a city; but most importantly, home was a place where their families and close friends were located. Participants with families and friends affected by a crisis felt personally connected to that crisis.

Maintaining the safety of family in the home country was most often a priority, and if they were unable to confirm or believe in this safety, participants felt anxious and worried. For example, once Cristina was able to confirm that her family and friends in the Philippines would not be directly affected by the typhoon, she was considerably less stressed:

So everyone's been talking about it on Facebook and I have family there so I made sure to call them and ask if they're okay. But you know, they're like, "Oh no, we're not gonna get hit so we're fine. You know, it's gonna rain, but it's not gonna be anything bad." So it's like, oh, okay good.

Pedro was also able to confirm that his family had not been directly affected by the financial collapse as of yet:

Luckily, my family and friends have not been directly affected yet. My dad has a stable job and my mother has worked in the same place for more than six years. My sister has recently graduated but she earns a reasonable amount of money doing some informal work.

For Cristina and Pedro, being able to confirm that their families were safe from the effects of the crises lessened their stress levels considerably. Unfortunately for the other three participants, sometimes there was not enough information to confirm the safety and well-being of family, which did not help reduce their levels of stress.

Anna, Om Manar, and Mohammed each felt particularly stressed because they felt their families were at risk in their home countries. Anna was worried that the conflict would spread to her region and affect her family. She explained:

I was really worried when they started going to the East and South and I was worried that it was gonna spread around. Because my region is bordering those regions; it's not very far away or it can spread from the North. So basically my region is kinda like all surrounded with these like protests that are going on.

She also worried as the fighting continued that her country would cease to exist and she “didn’t wanna come back and become a Russian citizen because this is where my family lives right now.” Anna felt that if Ukraine became a part of Russia, she would lose an important part of her identity as a Ukrainian person. Om Manar did not hear from her family for several weeks when the crisis first began in Libya. On the first day of the revolution, Om Manar and her husband tried to contact their families but no one answered. She started looking for news and found that:

They said there are a lot of young people are in street and the regime just killing them and there's a lot of dying people. And I start like, is my brothers there, my nephew? I was like, I call my husband and said I cannot stay here [at work], we have to call. And then I heard from my friend that nobody could contact anybody [in Libya]. ... And my husband start to watching the news and see the picture for people who killed just in case his brother or my brothers are there.

Libya was still unstable three years later and Om Manar continued to worry about her family's safety in her home country. In addition, she also worried about what would happen to her children when they all returned to Libya:

My kids is the first priority. I cannot take them in this. I mean kids in Libya start having a lot of psychological problem, because there's bombing every day. Like when I call one of my nephew and my niece and I heard that I said, "What's that?" And they said, "Oh don't worry Aunt, it's just like bombing." And my kids are crying because of the firework in July 4th. So my little one is crying because of the firework so I cannot imagine how she can live there will all these bombing and guns and stuff.

Each day brought Om Manar closer to the end of her program in the US and that made her feel more and more anxious as she was not sure what to do once her immigration status expires and she was no longer allowed to legally stay in the US. Mohammed's uncles and aunt were among the people displaced by the conflict with ISIS. He explained:

My aunt, my uncles, they are living in Tikrit. It's in the North, so now they are displaced. They left. Some people, they left to, like my uncle, he left to Erbil,

Kurdistan. It is a safe city. And my aunt, they just left to like Kirkuk. It's also like after that, the Peshmerga, the Kurdistan Army, they took control of Kirkuk. So my aunt went there. So this is like most of the people, they left from the North and West of Iraq.

Mohammed's parents and brother also left Baghdad for a time to escape the dangerous criminals that had overrun the city. He said,

When they left to Kurdistan, I felt better because I know they are safe. Yeah, so ... after time I was only worried about my family and now they are safe so I felt better. But now they went back to Baghdad.

Although his family moved back to Baghdad, he said that he still felt better than he did when the crisis first started. He still worried about them, but he didn't feel as stressed because he had learned to cope with the situation. Each of these participants expressed feelings of anxiety and worry over their families' safety.

In addition, other personal stressors weighed on participants' minds. Some of the participants mentioned a feeling of survivor's guilt. They felt as if they should not be enjoying their protected lives in the US when their families were struggling back in their home countries. For example, Mohammed had difficulty dealing with his depression for the first three months after hearing about ISIS coming into his country. He said,

Whenever I see beautiful place, I feel – I don't enjoy it. I feel bad. I say that I wish my family can enjoy this with me. Yeah, they're now, they are living a nightmare and I'm here enjoying, you know? So I never enjoyed like anything I did in the summer.

It wasn't until fall when Mohammed started to enjoy his life again and not feel guilty about being away from his family. Om Manar also expressed a sense of survivor's guilt when she was not able to go home to support her parents after her brother died. While crying, Om Manar explained:

My sisters and brother are around her [my mother] and taking care of her which is good and kind of calm me down when I feel like I didn't do my job. I didn't support them when they was in need of me, and this was another feeling I had.

Like I feel like guilty that I am here and they are under attack and all this stuff.

Om Manar felt guilty for being in the US while her family dealt with the dangerous realities of living in Libya. The pressure of survivor's guilt reminded students of their helplessness to be of support to their families during times of crisis.

In the middle of dealing with a home country crisis, a few participants were affected by personal losses that accentuated the pain they were feeling. When Anna's grandfather passed away, she said, "it added even more so I was very, very stressed." After submitting the survey to participate in this research study, Mohammed heard that one of his professors was killed by a car bomb in Iraq. His description of the professor showed how much he was affected by the man's death: "So like, I don't know. He was a very good man. He was ambitious, he was smart. Yeah. But he's lost." Om Manar was still trying to recover from the loss of her brother. His murder was a direct result of the events in her home country, and this event reminded Om Manar of her family's lack of safety in Libya:

I mean, I cannot just stay in USA and pretend everything is going right in my country. ... The fact that I lost my brother, I'm scared to lose more, that's why. I

mean, maybe people who didn't lose anybody feel like still safe and just like ... it's just news and media. But when you affected by it and see like I see like my nephew house bombed, I saw my university bombed, I lost my brother. So I feel like it's really serious, not just something I can watch the news and it's happening in another country. It's my home country.

Om Manar not only felt depressed over losing her brother, but was also terrified that she might lose another family member due to similar circumstances. Pressures such as fear of family safety, survivor's guilt, and personal loss added to participants' stress loads.

Subtheme 1.2: Financial pressures. Participants' and their families' financial stability was another source of stress. Some of the participants worried that their scholarships would be affected by the crisis in their home countries, and others had to start working to pay for rent and other utilities when their funding stopped suddenly. Other participants worried more about the effect the crisis would have on their families. Financial pressures were identified by nearly all of the participants in some form or another and often led to increased stress levels.

Although family financial issues shared a deep connection with the first subtheme, family and personal pressures, they were included in this section to distinguish them from other family-related pressures. For example, when the protests began in Ukraine, Anna's family experienced some of the countrywide economic depression firsthand: "We're just affected a little bit economically because the firm where he [my father] works cut lots of contracts. So he's bringing less money into the house and of course it's expensive to buy food and things like that." Her family had to be very careful with the money they spent to make sure that they could pay for utilities during the cold

winter months. When Mohammed's family left their home, they settled in a city with many other refugees. All of these people were forced to wait until their cities were safe again or their supply of money diminished, whichever came first. Mohammed said of his family, "So they stayed for like, I don't know. But you know they are not working, so they will just spend their money and then what? So now they went back to Baghdad." The city was not yet safe, so Mohammed began to worry about them again. Even so, his family had little choice in the matter, as they did not have enough money to stay out of work for too long. Pedro's family was not struggling financially, but he worried that the economy would only get worse and they may have to face financial pressures at some point in the near future. He also felt that he should take responsibility for his own financial situation instead of burdening his parents:

I'm planning to transfer when I go back to Brazil because my home institution is only like a research-oriented school. So I'm planning to transfer to another city and the university that I'm planning to transfer is like in a big city. And I'm kind of saving some kind of money here because when I go back, I mean, I'll not have a job. So I need to have a backup plan. I don't want to keep asking my parents ... every day for money. ... First because they do not have like a lot of money, and I mean, I think I can ... handle it by myself.

Pedro explained that many other Brazilians do not worry about these issues at his age. Many Brazilians live with their parents and rely on assistance from them until they are 25 years old. Family financial issues added a layer of stress for students who were already concerned about the effects of the crises on themselves and their families.

Several of the students also worried about the crises in their home countries affecting their scholarships. Pedro, Mohammed, and Om Manar were all sponsored by their governments to study in the US. Their tuition, fees, and living expenses were all covered by their scholarships. Since the crises began, though, each of these participants experienced delays in receiving their stipends. For example, Pedro worried that if the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program which sponsored his education lost its funding he would have to return home before the end of his program. He explained,

Yeah, I am very worried about it because it's a lot of money that Brazil is spending on us and with this whole corruption things and the declining economy that could definitely affect us. Yeah, I was talking to my friend like last weekend and he said the same thing that he's very worried. Sometimes we have a delay on receiving our stipends. That could definitely affect us, and I don't want to go back now.

Mohammed also experienced a delay in receiving his monthly stipend. He believed the delays were a direct result of the money the government was spending on fighting ISIS:

So now like the Iraqi government is almost broke. Because of they are like spending money on the war. Like they are buying weapons, they are like, even the U.S. airstrikes ... the Iraqi government, they pay for this. And besides, you know the prices of oil are decreasing. So this is like, we depend only on oil as major source of money, okay? And now they stopped this scholarship program. They stopped sending new students. And sometimes, we were affected of course. So sometimes we don't get our salary after like one month from when we supposed to get it.

Om Manar was also on a government scholarship in the US, however, since the Libyan revolution began in 2011, her scholarship money was reduced, delayed, and even stopped for a period of time. She said that the Libyan students used to have a very good scholarship, but because of the conflict and the political issues in the country, it was no longer very reliable. Om Manar explained:

Usually when Libyan student came they had like a very good scholarship with very good health insurance and a lot of other benefit, but since what's happened we lost a lot of benefit. Like I have to go to the conference in some state and they should pay me for everything, and I did it twice and they never pay me anything. Because they said there is no money come from Libya enough for this so we try just giving you your living allowance and the insurance. They never pay for my book after what happen so I have a lot of expense. It should all be covered by my scholarship but unfortunately I lost it all because of what's going on.

These financial pressures had a profound effect on Om Manar and her family in the US. Not only did she lose many of the benefits originally promised to her, but during the revolution, the money actually completely stopped for a period of several months. She said the UN froze much of the money coming from Libya during the revolution "to protect the money from Libya to go somewhere because of the Gaddafi family." All of these students' educations were originally fully funded by their governments. However, they began worrying constantly about the reliability of their funding after their crises began.

Due to the financial pressures of losing her scholarship, Om Manar had to start a part-time job in order to support her family in the US. She was the only one in her family

who could work and struggled to maintain her studies while trying to earn enough money to feed her family. She said that when she lost her scholarship, “I felt like, do I have to work too? And what work will ... make money to feed three kids and take care of the family? It was really, really hard.” Om Manar explained that all of the worries she experienced were not normal for Libyan women, because usually men take care of everything. However, her husband’s immigration status prevented him from working in the US. She said that if her husband were allowed to work, she would have had to bear less of the financial burden for the family. Om Manar said,

I remember when some of the FBI people came to the house and they ask us. I told them about that, I told them I just wish my husband could work. And they said maybe because his is a parent of USA [citizen] they may allow you to do that, but then when they asked, they called me and they said, “No, his visa will not allow him to work anyway.”

For Om Manar, the added pressure of having to work while writing her dissertation, raising three children, and being constantly reminded of the violent events occurring in her country elevated her stress to increasingly high levels.

Subtheme 1.3: Pressures from others. Encounters with other people during the crisis were sometimes stressful experiences for participants. Pressures in this subtheme were categorized as interactions with a group or person not directly related to the crisis that caused stress for participants. Two participants had negative interactions with fellow countrymen over the political situation in their countries. Others had to deal with discrimination and insensitivity from strangers, who had unknowingly caused stress for these participants when they asked questions without thinking about the effect these

questions might have on the participants. This subtheme will explore the stress caused by encounters with others.

Pedro and Om Manar, each of whom had large groups of fellow nationals at their universities, had negative encounters with a few individuals from their countries. Often when Pedro expressed his concerns about the president and the financial situation in Brazil, he was met with anger or complacency from his fellow countrymen. He said,

The president that was reelected, some people think that she is the best thing that could happen in Brazil, but actually it's not. But and people just really get mad at me when I criticize her. I don't know why, because I mean we are seeing all these troubles and they are kind of blinded. They're just, they are pretending they're not seeing the troubles or I mean, I don't know.

Many people disagreed with Pedro or were completely ignoring the issue. When this happened, Pedro felt isolated and invisible:

When I talk about this and people like do not believe me, it's just like, it seems to me that I'm like the only person, the person in the corner that, I don't know, that is like making stuff up and yeah. It's horrible.

This made Pedro feel as if he was the only one who cared about the country and recognized that there was a problem. These pressures were a primary source of stress for Pedro.

Over the past three years, Om Manar had to deal with the frightening reality of being a supporter of the revolutionary group from her country. She never imagined the revolution would happen, "not because Gaddafi is good, but because people there are really afraid." Om Manar explained that the Gaddafi regime inspired "forty years of

pressure, like hate, everything,” and people were never sure who they could trust when it came to supporting the revolution. Some people even threatened Om Manar and her family for supporting the revolution:

There were like some student supporting Gaddafi and there were, they start like to tell us, “You know this will not happen, this will not be successful and you go home you gonna get punishment for supporting the revolution against Gaddafi here.”

Fortunately for Om Manar, the threats never turned violent in her city in the US, however she did lose a friendship. She explained:

The problem wasn’t like the political issue. I can understand if you’re going to support any different party, but when you support killing people, I just cannot be friends with you. Like you wish that Gaddafi will get victory over my home city or she believe we [the revolutionaries] are starting everything and we [are] ruining the country and all this stuff. So and she believe like Gaddafi have right to kill people to stay in power, so I said let’s not [be friends].

These stressful encounters with Gaddafi supporters created turmoil within the Libyan community in Om Manar’s city. It was difficult for her because the conflicts with her countrymen made Om Manar feel like she was experiencing the crisis firsthand in the US. Similar to Pedro’s experiences with his fellow countrymen, Om Manar’s experiences represented stressful encounters with others.

Two participants experienced discrimination related to the crises going on in their countries. Mohammed saw various comments on social media sites that “say like ... Arabs or Muslims, they should die. They should disappear from Earth, they should

whatever. Yeah.” Seeing these kinds of comments made Mohammed feel unwelcome and misunderstood as an individual, an Iraqi, and a Muslim. Anna experienced a conflict with a U.S. student who expressed his political views through Facebook. She felt personally attacked when he shared a Russian propaganda cartoon that made fun of Ukraine:

And he posted this on Facebook you know. He posted this, this, you know, picture, this painting on Facebook and it made me really upset. ... I think that other people have no right to comment about something that they never experienced, and they don't know what's happening ... and I was really upset and I actually deleted him from Facebook because I just – If he posted something like this again? Because it made me really upset, and I was upset for the whole afternoon because of that.

Incidents like these contributed to the stress Anna and Mohammed felt during the crises. When others actively discriminated against them, they felt even more anxious about the events occurring in their countries.

As more people became aware of what was going on in Ukraine and started to take an interest, Anna received more and more questions. At first this was perceived as supportive, but as time went on, Anna no longer felt supported by these questions. In fact, she started to feel annoyed and hurt by the repetition of questions from strangers or people she did not know well. She felt that people could be insensitive when they asked about a crisis, because they did not think of how their questions would affect the person they were asking. Anna described a negative encounter she had with a friend on Facebook:

And he was like, “Oh maybe nuclear bomb exploded in Ukraine, have you seen this?” You know, and he didn’t think about how I would feel. I cannot do anything. I’m like a thousand miles away from my family and I cannot do anything. And he’s like sharing the news. ... He didn’t say like I’m sorry this has happened, he didn’t ask me like about my family. ... So sometimes people that don’t know me very well, they don’t really ask me about my family. They’re just like, “Oh, what do you think about the situation in Ukraine?” And it hurts, you know, because I *know*, I’m aware that it’s not that good.

Anna explained that these types of questions did not help her in any way, they just reminded her of how helpless she felt. She had other obligations in her life, and stopping to think about events that were so close and personal and caused so much stress for her sometimes disrupted her entire day. Pressures from others, or those pressures from sources external to the crisis itself, were prevalent among participants in this study and caused a significant amount of stress.

Theme 2: International students use a variety of information seeking strategies when a crisis occurs in their home country. A common theme in this study was the search for information during a home country crisis. The participants felt a need to know more information when they heard about what was occurring in their home countries. They were able to gather this information from several different sources, including television and online news sources, Facebook and other social media, talking with friends in the US or their home countries, and talking with family members in their home countries. Whenever the participants felt as if they did not have enough information, especially when that information concerned their families, they typically felt

more stressed and anxious. Over time, some participants began to question the trustworthiness of certain news sources. When they were exposed to highly distressing news, some participants were not sure what news was actually correct and what was exaggerated. Due to this concern, some participants limited their news intake to only certain sources.

Participants learned about the crises in their countries in different ways. Pedro initially heard about the Brazilian financial collapse from online media sources such as *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and some Brazilian media sources. As the crisis continued, Pedro began to use his family as a source of information: “I usually talk to my family about it, but I just Skype them usually on weekends, and I talk to them about what is happening in Brazil [and] the feedback I’m having here in the United States.” Cristina explained that she first saw pictures of the damage on Facebook: “My friends from back home, you know, were sharing pictures of the damage ... and then I saw how many people were dead.” When she realized that she wanted to do something to help, she dispersed information about her relief effort through social media forums. Cristina said,

And so I just kinda reached out on my Facebook. You know, it wasn’t like, I didn’t think it was gonna be a big deal, but what happened was my post got reshared so many times that it just blew up.

Om Manar discovered the news about Libya online one morning when she was expecting to see news about other countries. She then spent the day reading and watching news online. She and her husband created their first Facebook accounts that day so they could try to find more news about the revolution. Om Manar said that at that time, not many of

her family members used Facebook, but they had to rely on it as it was the only source of information they had:

At least we know a lot of like active people on Facebook and they keep posting like news about the city and names of people who killed, and they post people who injured. It wasn't very helpful, but at least when you see all these names and your brother is not or you mom or you dad's not at least you feel like kind of calm. A little bit.

Because Om Manar could not reach her family by phone or Skype, she continued to search other forums endlessly for news of home. Mohammed heard the news on Facebook. He said he began to watch the news and scan social media sites after ISIS took control of Mosul:

I woke up in the morning, watched the news. And because of the time difference between the places, like in the afternoon, I stopped hearing the news because there is nothing new. I started refreshing the pages or like watching the news but there is [nothing new]. I am waiting till they will wake up so I can watch the news again. So it would be maybe 4 am in the morning. And I will be, I will sleep maybe at 6 am. Probably. Yeah, and I didn't sleep much those days.

Mohammed was also calling his family every day to make sure they were okay. Anna also saw the news about Ukraine on Facebook. She then contacted a friend through a mobile application called Viber, "and we just talked about it and she told me what she heard on the news, and I was pretty upset." After a few days, she contacted her family through Skype. Facebook was a common source of information amongst all the

participants, however, they also used several other tools to find out what was happening in their countries.

Om Manar, Anna, and Mohammed all mentioned that they think their families sometimes lied to them in order to protect their feelings. These participants expressed this as though they knew their families cared about them, however, they felt that their families were not always the most trustworthy source of information. For example, after the death of her brother, Om Manar said,

My mom's really – When she call me, she pretend she's okay and she's good.

But I know. I'm calling my sisters and they told me she's really sad, she like, like she feel like there's nothing left to live [for].

Anna explained that she was so worried about what was going on at home and so flooded by different news sources that she did not know what to believe. She felt that her mom was not telling her the truth, so she made her best friend promise that she would tell her the truth about what was happening in Ukraine: “I always call my best friend, I was like, ‘So you have to promise me that you will tell me the truth, okay? My mom can lie to me, but you have to tell me the truth.’” Mohammed also felt that his friends were a more trustworthy source of information. He said,

I don't believe my family when they say they are, like everything's okay. I think they just say this ... to make me feel good, you know? To not worry about them. They say, “Everything's alright, don't worry, life is good in here.” So I kept calling my friends to make sure that everything is alright, you know? ... I think they will tell the truth, yeah. They don't lie to me. ... They don't care about my emotions [laughter].

Anna, Mohammed, and Om Manar knew that their families worried for their well-being, and because of this, they felt that their families would be willing to lie to them if it meant protecting them from further harm. Sometimes, the participants chose to seek out more trustworthy sources to confirm their families' stories.

Anna found that the most trustworthy source of information was seeing her country with her own eyes. Going home really helped her recover from her anxiety and depression: "It was very helpful for me to go home and see with my own eyes that, you know, the conflict, at least towards my family, you know there is nothing going on with my family in my city." Anna said her trip home also made her question the information she received from other sources. When she returned to the US, she decided to stop watching and reading the news about world crises. Anna explained how reading the news affected her: "I noticed that news exaggerate things a lot. ... There are so many inaccurate information in Russian news, that it's just crazy. And then you like wanna read more and it distracts you and then it upsets you because it's like worrying." Mohammed came to this decision, too. They both felt that it was better for their health to not watch the news too much, as much of the news was exaggerated or incorrect. Mohammed explained:

At first, you will hear a lot of news. So the government ... they will say ... they defeated ISIS in this area, this area, [and] this area. But the opposite side, like I go to Facebook and search for news, you will hear no, now they are like 40 kilometers from Baghdad. Like you will hear different news. And you will not know what the truth is.

Anna decided not to look at news on Facebook anymore as well. She preferred to hear news directly from her friends or family. She said,

I think right now that everything I need to know about what's going on in the world, I will hear it from other people. If it's like a really big deal, you know people will be talking about it and I will hear it from people.

Both Anna and Mohammed said that they primarily cared about their families, so they preferred not to see news about what else was going on in their countries. Anna said, "You know, for me at this point what matters is if my family is safe. You know, so that's it." Discovering which sources of information were the most trustworthy was often a difficult task for participants.

Om Manar was not able to stop watching the news. Because the internet and phone networks were not very stable, Om Manar did not rely on those avenues to obtain information. Sometimes the only way she could find information was through television and social media, even though she knew that these sources were not always the most accurate. She said that she cared about her family most of all, but she also cared about her country as a whole and did not want to see it destroyed. Om Manar said, "It's *my* country. ... I never went outside my country before I came here. I cannot imagine [living] in another place." Although some of her friends and even her husband told her to stop watching the news so much, she said she could not stop caring about what was going on in her country. Information seeking strategies varied among participants during a home country crisis, and different strategies worked better for different participants.

Theme 3: International students have to adjust to the crisis and find a new normal. After a large-scale crisis occurs in their home countries, international students

must adjust to new routines, some of which may become permanent parts of their lives. These students must learn to adjust to their new lives during the crisis, all while living in the United States. Adjustment to this new normal may look different for each student, and may be temporary or permanent. This theme will discuss the many different forms adjustment has taken for the participants in this study. It is divided into two subthemes: *institution and population size, crisis visibility, and relationships* and *the process of coping*. Because support systems are an integral part of adjusting to a crisis, the first subtheme will explore how the context of the crises and the participants' environments and relationships affected their perception of support. The second subtheme will discuss the coping process in the context of participant experiences and how that process leads to adjustment.

Subtheme 3.1: Institution and population size, crisis visibility, and relationships. Support systems are an important part of adjusting to a home country crisis. The participants in this study explained that they had different support systems that have helped them endure the crises in their home countries. The size of the institution, the size of the conational population enrolled at the institution, and the visibility of the crisis in U.S. news sources all contributed to how these participants perceived being supported. Furthermore, some of the participants mentioned that they felt most supported when people asked about their families and tried to connect with them on a more personal level. This subtheme explores the idea that size, visibility, and relationships may affect how support is perceived by international students affected by a home country crisis.

Both the size of the institution and the size of the population of fellow nationals at that institution contributed to how some participants experienced support. Anna felt that the size of her university contributed to how supported she felt: “I was thinking like a small university probably would have more support like to the things I wanted to do, you know ... because it’s small and it’s easier to create like closer relationships.” Anna was one of two Ukrainian students at her institution, and she said of the other student:

It was nice to have him, like somebody who you know really understands ... and has like the same feelings about it. ... [But] it would be even nicer to have support, like this group of Ukrainian students, so I can talk about it.

Mohammed felt similarly about the small group of Iraqi students at his institution. He said, “The Iraqi friends ... we talk about it, we all are like, all of us in this together. Yeah, so we supported each other.” Because there are only five Iraqi students, they formed a close connection and relied on each other for support. Since the Ukrainian population was so small at the university, Anna sometimes felt that not many people outside of the department knew about her and what was happening in her country. Typically this feeling of invisibility left her feeling unsupported. However, Anna also mentioned that she thought she occasionally received some special treatment because she was the only international student in her department. She said,

Everyone knew that I’m the one international student in the department. They knew me and they knew I’m from Ukraine, because it was always on the news, everyone knew what was going on, and so ... probably it was one of the reasons [laughing]. ... Didn’t want me to be upset probably!

The small size of both the institution and the student population affected how these participants perceived the level of support at their institutions.

At institutions with larger populations of students, the perception of support may vary depending on the crisis and the cultural group. For Pedro, the large number of other Brazilian students did not make him feel more supported. In fact, although there were nearly 150 Brazilians at Pedro's university, very few of them seemed concerned about the financial collapse. Some of them even disagreed with him. Because of this, Pedro often felt isolated and alone. However, Om Manar had different feelings about how the size of the Libyan population at her university contributed to the amount of support they received. She explained, "There's a lot of Libyan at [my institution]. And I think ... because we were ... a lot of students, that's why they felt the need ... to provide some support. I mean they were so supportive for all of us." When the Libyan students were not receiving their scholarships, the institution helped out in a number of ways:

So the first thing they said, you don't have to pay until your scholarship come, and there's no penalty. ... The second thing they did that they give us, what they call, work permission to work off the campus. I know not a lot of people were successful to get job but at least they give us the opportunity to look for a job as a student. ... Also they directed us to some service that help the needy. ... Also they, the international office offer some, what they call ... support group ... Because they know our culture so they make just women for the women and men for the men because we don't mix.

Because the group of Libyan students was so large, the institution decided to help their students as soon as the crisis occurred. However, with a similarly sized population of

Brazilian students, the institution did not offered any assistance. Among other differences, the Brazilian financial collapse was relatively less visible in the news compared to the Libyan crisis. Visibility will be discussed next.

Some participants felt that the amount of attention their crises received from the U.S. media had an effect on how much support they received. For the most part, Pedro felt that few people knew of the events occurring in Brazil. He said, “I don’t think they have like, kind of idea what is happening because it’s like in Brazil, so. People do not care so much about Brazil.” However, Pedro was occasionally surprised when someone did know about the financial collapse. For example, he mentioned:

I was taking the bus once and the driver started talking to me like about what was happening with the economy. He was like really surprised because it was, the economy in 2009 and 2010 was like really doing really well and now it’s just falling apart.

But when he talked to others about the situation in his country, most people seemed unaware: “Usually it’s the kind of reaction like, ‘I didn’t know that this was happening.’ Like it’s usually this.” The Brazilian financial collapse had received media attention, however, it was not sensational news. Om Manar explained that not many domestic students seemed to be aware of the events that occurred after Gaddafi was killed:

Yeah, some people think things are become better in my country. So when they saw me ... [they say], “Why you, you didn’t graduate yet?” So I told them, I say I delay my graduation, they said that, “We didn’t hear anything in the news, we thought everything was going okay.”

Since Libya was not in the news as much, people no longer realized what was happening. Events that had occurred since Gaddafi's death went unnoticed by the general population. Anna explained that at the beginning of the crisis, many people were paying attention to her because Ukraine was always on the local news. At first, this increased interest in her country and the events happening there was a welcome change. She said,

I appreciated that my professors were interested and they said that if you ever need anything let me know. You know, they were more caring I think. ... So I think this conflict made my relationships with people around me closer, like with my professors I think it's even brought us closer because they were like, you know, we weren't only talking about school but sometimes about personal things.

As the crisis continued, however, Anna began to think that many people believed the conflict in her country had been resolved. She explained:

It's not on the news, so you know people don't talk about it. ... Right now nobody ask me like about, you know, what's going on. Because they think everything is kind of ... calmed down. Yes, everything is over because it's not in the news anymore. So nobody knows.

The lack of visibility of their crises left Anna, Om Manar, and Pedro feeling unacknowledged and at times unsupported. Those participants who felt unsupported had difficulty adjusting during the crises.

For Cristina, the highly visible nature of super typhoon Haiyan led to a huge outpouring of support. She said,

Yeah, I mean it was insane. It was literally like, insane. Like I created a Facebook page so there's like, the communication's easier. Um yeah, like three

days later I had like 800 likes. I was like, oh my god, this is insane! [laughing]

You know, like it had more likes that I had friends on Facebook.

She was amazed by how quickly and how much people wanted to help. Cristina explained that she felt really supported by a number of different people: “Yeah so some of them are Filipino, you know? So that was nice. ... And then a lot of them were like my friends too, you know. And they’re like, ‘Yeah, I’ll help.’ And a lot of coworkers.” The visibility of super typhoon Haiyan led to Cristina’s perception of increased levels of support during the crisis. She said that because the typhoon was all over the news, more people were aware of what was happening and willing to help. The relative visibility or invisibility of a particular event may explain why some students feel more supported than others when a crisis occurs abroad.

Many of the participants in this study felt most supported when the importance of their families was acknowledged by others. This idea of the importance of family relationships was echoed by Anna, Mohammed, and Om Manar. Anna perceived people as more caring when they asked about her family and not about the crisis itself. For example, Anna said that her host mom “would always like ask me, how’s your family, how they doing, like always caring.” Furthermore, she mentioned: “We have a very small graduate program and they will be like also asking and you know, they were very, very nice. They would take time to talk to me and just ask about my family all the time.” This experience was similar for Mohammed. He felt that his thesis advisor was particularly nice and supportive, and part of this feeling came from the way she expressed concern for his family: “She kept asking me, and she was asking me about my family, if

they are doing alright and that stuff. She was super nice.” Om Manar received a lot of help from people caring for her and her children after her brother died. She said,

After I lost my brother, I got really huge support from the whole community, not just Libyan community. ... For 15 or 20 days, there were like people in my home every day. And they bringing food, they bringing stuff for my kids, and they tried to take my kids somewhere because it was winter break. And my kids understand in the beginning that I lost my brother and I’m sad, but then after that, they said they wanted to enjoy their break, they are kids! They were like eight and six and four, so my friends tried to make like a schedule to take my kids with them to the places they used to go or to other [places]. And bring some toys to the kids or something, so it was really good time even though I was in really pain. But feeling that there’s people around me and they’re taking care of me and my kids and my family was a really good feeling.

Even though Om Manar was struggling emotionally, this outpouring of support from people concerned about her family made her feel supported and loved.

Acknowledgement of family relationships mattered significantly to participants in this study.

Not only did the participants’ relationships with family matter, but the relationships with the people lending support also mattered for some students. Relationships with professors and supervisors seemed to be the strongest source of support for many of the graduate students in this study. Anna, Om Manar, and Mohammed all mentioned their reliance on their professors for support. Om Manar, the only student to do so, even sought counseling after her professor gave her a referral. She

said her PhD supervisor advised her to seek counseling: “She told me, if you are depressed then you have to go there. I mean, I was thinking about that but when she said that I felt like I had to go. And I was, it was helpful.” However, had she not received the referral, she probably would not have sought counseling. She explained that very few Libyans seek counseling because this kind of behavior is not a regular part of their culture. In addition to the cultural barrier, Om Manar said that sometimes it was hard for her to communicate with the counselor due to a language barrier:

Explaining your feeling in a second language is really hard. Even though your English is good or people understand you when you talk, it’s not the same. When I wanna say how much pain or something, I just. Sometimes I couldn’t find the right word, and if I use another word I feel like, yeah this is not the word I was looking for but I have to do it, use it, because I don’t know another one.

It is important to note that Om Manar sought counseling largely due to the relationship she had with her supervisor. Had she not been comfortable sharing her feelings with that person, she may not have received a referral and thus would not have sought help.

Relationships with professors seemed to be an important source of support for many of the participants in this study. However, this was not true for the undergraduate student, Pedro. Pedro did not feel it was appropriate for him to reach out to his professors because of the lack of personal relationships with those people. He explained, “I have not talked to them about this because I think here in the US, I don’t know, the relationship between professor and student is like kind of more professional and I do not talk about this.” Furthermore, because he was not experiencing any trouble with his classes due to the crisis, he did not feel the need to reach out to these people.

Relationships with faculty and others on campus are important indicators of how students perceive support and how they adjust during times of crisis.

Subtheme 3.2: The process of coping. The participants in this study used a variety of different coping strategies to try to manage their emotions during the crises in their home countries. The coping strategies may have appeared in different forms on an individual level, but participants' experiences shared some similarities. Participants typically felt less stressed when they used a coping strategy, whether it was giving a presentation, participating in a demonstration, exercising, organizing a relief drive, or refocusing on career goals. Different participants used different coping strategies in an effort to maintain their emotional well-being. Coping cannot be seen as an individual event; one does not experience a crisis, cope with it, and then return to normal. Rather, coping is a series of adjustments made over a period of time which may result in a new normal. During this process, international students affected by a home country crisis may feel a variety of emotional peaks interspersed with periods of calm, or they may endure rapid changes as they experience a series of stressors and support. This subtheme will explore the process of coping for the participants of this study.

Each of the participants experienced mounting trepidation as the events in their countries occurred which eventually resulted in a spike of emotions as many of the stressors of the events compiled onto one another. This peak in emotions was then usually followed by a period of lessening anxiety and depression as the participants sought support or utilized different coping strategies to alleviate their stress. For example, after a period of constantly checking in with his family and watching the news, Mohammed reached the height of his depression. He said,

I didn't get very well after one month, but I felt like I am destroying myself by doing this. I was still watching the news, I kept watching the news, but I starting to go out. Like I sometimes I didn't sleep, so I sometimes I was going biking in like 6 am in the morning. I didn't even sleep yet. ... Just doing nothing. Just go biking and come back, and sleep after. Yeah, I just wanted to feel something good.

That was the start of Mohammed's recovery. He explained that his anxiety and depression lessened significantly after a few months: "Yeah, this is what I decided. ... After like two months, I was depressed, to be honest. I said, I will stop doing this. I will stop watching news. And that's what I did." After making this decision, he began to feel better. Similarly, Anna described how her stress levels reduced after going home:

I remember I was very scared. I had a very tough semester and it really interfered with my studies because I was reading the news and I would get upset and I wouldn't be able to concentrate on my studies that well. And I had to work too, and I was, it was stressful too at one point. ... It was like, sometimes overwhelming. You know I remember like I couldn't, it was very tough for me to finish my paper. And besides, my grandfather died at the same, he died at the end of April and I was, it added even more so I was very, very stressed. So and then you know my family saw that I'm really upset and they said, "You should come and see, you should be home and spend some time with us." So then after like I got my ticket and I went right after the end of the semester, and I saw with my own eyes that everything okay, my family is fine, so I got better.

Anna experienced an intense buildup of anxiety and stress as more and more events occurred during her spring semester. Returning home marked a turning point for her, however, and she began to recover from the majority of the stress she felt during the height of the crisis. In Cristina's case, she felt the majority of her stress not at the height of the disaster, but rather as a result of her own coping strategy, that of organizing the relief effort. She described her emotions during this time: "You know, I went from like really sad to like overwhelmed. But I'm like, 'No, but I have to do this.' You know? And then I felt good, you know, after going through that." Unlike Anna and Mohammed, Cristina implemented her coping strategy fairly early in her adjustment process. Although she was extremely overwhelmed by the relief effort instead of the crisis itself, Cristina's emotions mirror those of Anna and Mohammed. They each experienced a sharp spike in emotions followed by a period of gradually lessening stress.

Om Manar's initial emotional peak was followed by a second, higher peak when her brother was killed. Her coping process looked markedly different from the others because there were two spikes instead of one. She explained how just as she was beginning to recover from the first spike, her fear began to build again:

After they said the country is free, we have like couple of months, or maybe eight or seven month. The thing was like, going to be okay, like when I call my friend, my family said, "Yeah, you know, it's like it's in ... transition zone, we're going to be okay." You know everything is there, money is a lot, people are like feel good, and then after that these militia start to become bigger and stronger, and they try to take over the country. And then I start the same feeling. Every, you know, I sleep with my phone and I open in the morning Viber. ... I make sure

they [my family] all safe. And Facebook, just to see what's going on. And I have been there since like 2012.

After her brother died, Om Manar experienced her second spike in stress and anxiety. She explained that her turning point after the second spike was when she sought help from counseling:

Then I start just to cry for everything, then my supervisor said, "You have to look for consultations." So I went to the health network that belonged to the university and I got some help from a lady, she's international too and she's a PhD student. So after that I start to think, I really like I have to finish this. I came for the degree and I have to done it. ... My mom was the reason I finish my school. I am the first one in my sister that went to the university because of my mom encouraging and pushing so I felt like I don't wanna let her down after all these years. ... That's why I come back and I'm doing it right now so I'm trying to finish.

This part of Om Manar's coping process seemed to mirror Anna's and Mohammed's, as they each focused on a particular coping strategy in order to try to manage their stress. Their stress levels gradually decreased after the spike in emotions caused them to implement a coping strategy.

The period after the emotional peak was typically marked by ups and downs as participants experienced new stressors which raised their stress levels and subsequently utilized support or coping strategies to return their anxiety to a more manageable level. At this stage in the coping process, participants began to adjust to having the crises as part of their lives. They learned how to use specific coping strategies to manage their

emotions. For example, after Anna became upset because of the propaganda she saw on Facebook, she explained, “I had to go and do yoga to [laughing] to relax my brain. ... Yeah, it really helps me to stabilize my emotions.” Mohammed described how his stress levels are still somewhat unpredictable after his emotional spike:

Sometimes, I have my days. Sometimes I will wake up, feel like I had enough, you know. But sometimes, I will say, “No, this is life. This is what life is all about.” So sometimes I feel bad, sometimes I’m happy, I don’t know. Depends.

He had a strategy that helped him maintain a more stable life, though: “I have to finish my masters, like it’s my goal. ... I don’t want my goals in life to be affected by anything else so this is my priority. I will keep pushing myself til I get there.” Other participants echoed this sentiment of having a goal that kept them focused on something other than the crisis in their home countries. Mohammed and Anna’s statements exemplify how the process of coping continued on for a much longer period of time after the initial spike in emotions. These participants continued to implement strategies or seek support whenever a new stressor threatened to raise their anxiety and worry again.

As these participants continued to adjust to the ongoing crises in their home countries, they began to find a new normal. This new normal was different from how they lived their lives before the crises, but they were no longer experiencing such dramatic changes in emotions as they were during the height of the crises. For example, Om Manar explained how her life changed after the revolution began:

Everything changed. Even our ... food habit. ... Like my husband gain a lot of weight, I mean he usually stay home but he’s very active. Like when kids are in school he just go around, go exercise, go to the gym, sometimes he just run on the

street. But since the revolution start, we just stay next to the laptops seeing news and that mean we eat.

This change may only have been temporary, but the differences in their lives showed in other ways, too. Om Manar said that before the revolution, Libyan students rarely worked because they had a full scholarship to the US and did not need to earn any money while they lived in the US. However, because of the unreliability of the scholarship funds, that changed. Many Libyans, rather than wait to see if their stipends would arrive on time, implemented new routines as a safety net:

Before the revolution, you ... barely ... find a Libyan student who worked. ... But now most of the students are working. Most of their, like um supervisor ask them to work in the lab and give them some money. Some of them, they try to find other situation, they help other student for money or something like that. So they ... ask money from the country, like from their home family or something, so.

They just, we try to survive.

The new routine of working part-time may indeed become a permanent lifestyle change for Om Manar and many other Libyan students who feel that they can no longer rely only on funding from their government to support their stays in the US. Mohammed also expressed how he found a new normal after a few months. He said,

I feel better right now. You'll get used to it. Like it's not like the first time when it happened. And as I said, I ... don't wanna be like careless person, but ... if I keep worrying, I will not be able to study, be able to finish my master degree. So as I told you, I stopped watching the news, I went out, I wanted to have fun, to like, to feel better.

He continued to cope with the situation in his country, but at this time had regained his sense of purpose and no longer felt quite as stressed as he did when the crisis first began.

Anna explained that she was able to adjust to the crisis in Ukraine and move forward with her life. She even began to feel optimistic about the future of her country:

And sometimes I have this optimistic feeling that once we [Ukraine] go through all of these things, that it will get better. Like sometimes I compare the situation in Ukraine with like a disease ... Like if you have a flu, you like feel really, really bad and then you get better. So this is how I feel like my country will go through some kind of reforms, and maybe through some economical and political crises, but then it will get better. You know, that's how, what I think. So I'm optimistic right now.

Anna's optimism indicated how she had adjusted to the crisis in her home country. She, like Mohammed and Om Manar, was still in the process of coping with the ongoing events in her country. The adjustments made by these participants show how some international students may establish a new normal during a home country crisis.

Conclusion

The three themes discussed above highlighted how five international students were affected by crises in their home countries and how they received support and learned to cope during these times. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings from these themes and discuss them in the context of previous literature on adult experiences of crises. From this analysis, I will then offer recommendations for professionals serving international students at institutions of higher education and suggest avenues for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The ever growing number of international students at institutions in the US carries a unique set of challenges for professionals in international education and student affairs. All individuals have hidden identities. For international students, one of these hidden identities may be that of coming from a country steeped in crisis. However well-versed in current events we may be as professionals, there is no way to know how many of our students struggle to cope with events in their home countries. These events may range from natural disasters to wars to financial crises to epidemics. World crises will not disappear, and institutions must realize that as they increase their recruitment of international students, the number of students with connections to those crises also increases. As educators, we have a commitment to serve and support all students. Therefore if we chose to continue to enroll international students at our institutions, we must discover and adapt to the unique needs of international students affected by home country crises.

Summary of Findings

The previous chapter summarized the findings of data collected from five participants who are currently or were previously enrolled at two public institutions in the western United States: Sunny State University and the University of the Rivers. The participants shared their stories of living in the US while a major crisis affected their home countries. As the primary researcher, I formed three research questions to help guide me while conducting three semi-structured interviews with each participant. I hoped to explore the experiences of these international students and learn how they were

affected, how they coped, and how they perceived support at their institutions while facing the effects of a home country crisis. In this chapter, I will summarize the themes that developed out of the data gleaned from multiple interviews with each participant and document collection procedures. Then, I will situate each theme within the existing literature on international students and the psychological effects of crises on adults. Finally, I will discuss implications for practice and suggest areas for future research within the scope of international education.

Summary of Themes

The previous chapter discussed three major themes which developed from the data collected during this study. The three themes were (a) stress caused by crisis, (b) information seeking strategies, and (c) adjustment to crisis. The first theme was divided into three subthemes: family and personal pressures, financial pressures, and pressures from others. There were no subthemes for the second theme, which discussed the use of information seeking strategies. Finally, the third theme was also divided into two subthemes: institution and population size, crisis visibility, and relationships; and the process of coping. I will summarize some key takeaways from the findings below:

- International students experience stress during times of crisis due to worrying about the safety of their families and friends in their home countries.
- Stress may increase when other factors are present, such as personal loss, financial problems, and negative encounters with others.

- Too much information can overwhelm international students and cause stress to increase. Similarly, not enough information can also cause significant stress.
- Several factors influence how the supportiveness of an institution is perceived including the size of the institution, size of the student population, and visibility of the crisis.
- Relationships matter. Concern may not be perceived as such when no prior relationship is present or the importance of one's family is not acknowledged.
- Different coping strategies may work for different students during different crises.
- International students who experience crises go through a coping process during and after the crises that may help them adjust.

Connection to Literature

As noted in Chapter 2, very little literature addresses the effect home country crises have on international students in the US. Although this study represents merely one addition to the research on the international student experience during crisis, it will hopefully spur a cascade of other studies examining this phenomenon. I will discuss connections between the research findings and previous literature on adults dealing with crisis below.

Theme 1: Crisis in the home country causes a good deal of stress for international students living in the US. When the crises in Brazil, Iraq, Libya, the Philippines, and Ukraine first began, the international students at Sunny State University

and the University of the Rivers were faced with a number of different stressors. Many of them worried about family members left behind in the home country, financial concerns, personal losses, and feelings of guilt, anxiety and depression. They also struggled with conflicts with fellow nationals, discrimination, and insensitivity from others. Misra et al. (2003) suggested that this combination of stressors is not uncommon and in fact, “significant stressors rarely occur singly. Frequently one stressor triggers another stressor, and a cluster of stressors may develop. Hence, a failure to understand the full array of stressors in an individual’s life results in misleading or incomplete inquiry” (p. 138). It is the combination of stressors in these students’ lives that can lead to serious psychological concerns such as depression, chronic anxiety, and other issues. Anna explained some of the different stressors affecting her:

Try to imagine like in my case. What if you would be a graduate student and you had to work, you have to support yourself, you know? You have to write your thesis, you have to do other obligations like cooking, cleaning, and then you’re also taking other classes apart from your thesis, you know. And you are lonely, you need to maintain relationships with people around you, and then you have this thing going on in your country. And you really don’t know what’s going on like specifically because you’re not there, so you’re always kind of guessing, you know?

The stressors affecting these students cannot be separated into neat boxes and analyzed one by one. As Misra et al. explained above, in order to try to comprehend a students’ experience, one must see the entire picture. Students affected by crisis in their home countries have an added layer of stress that has entangled itself into the daily stress of

their lives, sometimes making what usually would be a minor problem seem unmanageable.

The reactions to crises varied widely among participants in this study. Many previous studies (Allen et al., 2012; Badri et al., 2012; Liverant et al., 2004; Main et al., 2011; Schwitzer, 2003) found that connections to family and friends in an area affected by crisis can have a significant impact on students. The findings from this study indicated that this was also true for each of the five participants. Allen et al. (2012) suggested that as the number of connections to the country in crisis rose, so did symptoms of anxiety and depression. Although Cristina still identified the Philippines as her home country, her ties to her home country might be considered weaker than the other students' because she had lived in the US for over 10 years. These weaker connections in part may explain why her reaction to the crisis in the Philippines seemed less intense compared to Anna's, Mohammed's, or Om Manar's reactions. Another reason for the difference in reactions could be due to the vastly different nature and context of each crisis (Galea & Resnick, 2005). Although Mohammed and Om Manar both mentioned a feeling of survivor's guilt, Pedro did not. A financial collapse has vastly different consequences from a war or terrorist activity, so this difference is not surprising.

Om Manar's experience stood out among the participants' as particularly emotional and traumatic. Her story had a number of differences, including her inability to stop watching the news, the death of her brother, conflicts with fellow nationals, a spouse and three young children, and length of time that the crisis had been ongoing. It is unlikely a single element can explain why Om Manar was so affected by the crisis in

Libya. Instead, the elements should be viewed together, as each compounded the other and created a highly complex and stressful experience. Previous literature supports the idea that high exposure to media (Holman et al., 2014), personal losses (Badri et al., 2012), political disagreements (Mori, 2000), and family-related pressures (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991) can each exacerbate an already stressful situation for students. Taken as a whole, Om Manar's story showed a curved line of emotions that rose with each successive event in the past four years. The revolution of 2011 represented a high point on the line which was followed by a lower, less stressful period before the militants arrived. As the violence in the country began to rise again, so did Om Manar's stress levels. The line spiked after the death of her brother and has remained uneven since, rising with distressing news reports and falling whenever she receives support from friends and family. Om Manar's reactions to the revolutionary period and the turmoil in Libya afterward, if viewed as separate events, may confirm Schwitzer's (2003) assertion that students who have experienced crisis in the past are "particularly susceptible to more advanced difficulties" (p. 55).

Although some of the literature spoke to the stress caused by political disagreements and discrimination (Jones, 2012; Mori, 2000; Yakushko et al., 2008), only Jones's (2012) dissertation findings mentioned unintended stress caused by individuals with good intentions. Anna's negative encounters with insensitivity from well-meaning but perhaps misguided acquaintances and strangers were not unlike the experiences of Paula and Caroline from Jones's dissertation whose family members intervened in their lives with good intentions but ultimately caused the students more stress. Faculty, staff, and students at Anna's institution were unknowingly guilty of inflicting more stress on

her because they were unaware of the impact their questions and comments had. The findings from this study support Jones' assertion that social interaction can sometimes increase distress for international students if that interaction is perceived negatively.

Theme 2: International students use a variety of information seeking strategies when a crisis occurs in their home country. Previous literature supports the idea that watching media coverage of a traumatic event can be psychologically damaging (Baschnagel et al., 2009; Holman et al., 2014; Young et al., 2013). Anna, Mohammed, and Om Manar all acknowledged the damage that watching too much news caused for them. Holman et al. (2014) suggested that people who are stressed after a crisis should limit the amount of media they watch in order to decrease their anxiety. Findings from this study seem to support this suggestion, as Mohammed and Anna both experienced significant decreases in their stress levels after removing media consumption from their routines. However, if other sources of information are not readily available to students, limiting media intake may not be a viable option.

Previous research focused primarily on the consumption of U.S. broadcast news, but no study has written about the use of alternative information sources, such as family and friends or social media. The students in this study used a variety of different methods to obtain the information they needed. Participants tended to show a preference for information from primary sources such as speaking to family, friends, or seeing the country for themselves. Misra et al. (2003) suggested that "contact with one's own culture ... [was] particularly helpful in reducing academic stressors and their consequent reactions" (p. 151). Perhaps the preference for primary sources can be explained by the positive effects of contact with home, such as reduced stress and increased perception of

support (Misra et al., 2003). However, for students like Om Manar, sometimes contact with these sources was not readily available. She relied heavily upon social and broadcast media at the beginning of the crisis because there were no alternative sources of information. Pedro, too, relied on media sources he deemed respectable, such as *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, and *Financial Times* to support his belief that Brazil was suffering a financial collapse. Information seeking behaviors have not been widely studied in the existing literature. The findings of this study show that international students may trust alternative sources to provide the information they need during a home country crisis.

Theme 3: International students have to adjust to the crisis and find a new normal. As was the case in previous literature (Jones, 2012; MacGeorge et al., 2007; Misra et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008), systems of social support were especially important to all five participants in this study. Anna and Cristina had support systems already in place when the crises occurred in their countries. Like the Haitian students at Northcentral Technical College (Dessoiff, 2011), Anna felt particularly connected to her two host families who showed their support by being mindful of her feelings and asking about her family to show that they cared. Mohammed relied on the other Iraqi students at his university. According to Mori (2000), feeling forced to spend time within small national groups can sometimes result in a negative experience. This was not the case for Mohammed or Anna, whose national group was made up of five and two nationals, respectively. Contrary to Mori's belief, feelings of isolation and conflict arose within the larger national groups as opposed to the smaller ones. Pedro often felt isolated within the large Brazilian group at his university because

very few of those Brazilians agreed with him about the crisis in their country. Om Manar also experienced negative encounters within her national group when she met other Libyans who did not support the revolution. Therefore, this study serves as a reminder that even students with a large number of fellow countrymen to rely upon may feel isolated and lonely at times.

Misra (2003) and Olivas and Li (2006) explained how important the perception of support can be for students. Olivas and Li even suggested that perception is more important than receipt of said support. The participants' perception of how visible their crises were at their institutions affected how supported they felt. At times, the way the media portrayed the crisis underplayed its importance or made it seem as if the conflict was over. When students perceived that no one knew about what was happening in their countries, they typically felt ignored and unacknowledged by others. Lack of acknowledgement of a crisis can be just as harmful to students as the crisis itself. Pedro struggled when what he saw as obvious indications of Brazil's failing economy were met with a lack of recognition or even blatant criticism from other Brazilian, international, and domestic students. When participants perceived their crises as invisible on campus, they associated this with a lack of interest and support from administration. These findings support existing literature which posits that the perception of support is significantly important when assisting international students with their adjustment to a crisis.

Participants adjusted to the crises occurring in their home countries in various ways. Previous literature did not address the process of coping as a whole, rather studies focused on the use of coping strategies. Many studies explored the difference between

active and passive coping strategies, where active strategies included problem solving and planning behaviors and passive strategies included self-blame and withdrawal behaviors (Baschnagel et al., 2009; Bleich et al., 2003; Liverant et al., 2004; Main et al., 2011). As Main et al. (2011) suggested, the participants in this study relied upon a variety of coping strategies, which included both active and passive behaviors. For example, Cristina took more of a problem solving approach to the crisis in the Philippines when she organized the relief drive. Some other active strategies participants used to cope with the crises in their home countries included participating in demonstrations, giving presentations, and focusing on future goals.

According to the literature, passive coping was typically associated with higher symptoms of stress (Baschnagel et al., 2009; Bleich et al., 2003; Liverant et al., 2004; Main et al., 2011), but Main et al. cautioned the application of this theory to non-Western cultures as it has not been widely tested on these populations. Participant experiences seem to support Main et al.'s finding that the use of any coping strategy, active or passive, can aid students with adjustment. For example, Mohammed and Anna used exercise as a way of escaping from the stress. Escaping or avoiding a situation are commonly categorized as passive coping strategies. Therefore, participants in this study employed active coping strategies, such as participating in demonstrations and organizing relief efforts, as well as passive coping strategies, such as exercising and emotional support seeking. Different coping strategies worked for different participants, but the variation did not seem to depend solely on whether the strategy was active or passive.

Although the literature has largely focused on the use of coping strategies and the influence of such strategies on stress, this study explored the process of coping with a

crisis from a more holistic viewpoint. For the participants of this study, the coping process began with the start of the crisis and continued throughout and after the events in their home countries. Stress levels during this process were typically affected negatively by stressors and positively by support and coping strategies. This study viewed coping as an ongoing task focused on adjusting to having a crisis become part of a participant's life. Therefore, the findings of this study present an interesting conception of the coping process as a whole which has not been previously explored.

The findings of this study also confirmed the idea that counseling services are underused by the international student population (Clark Oropeza et al., 1991; Mori, 2000; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994; Yakushko et al., 2008). Only one student, Om Manar, sought assistance from counseling. Her description of this experience is not unexpected. Sandhu (1994) and Yakushko et al. (2008) suggested that international students may only attend counseling if they are referred, which was the case for Om Manar. In agreement with the literature (Mori, 2000; Clark Oropeza et al., 1991), Om Manar had not considered counseling on her own because she did not associate it with her cultural norms. Furthermore, Om Manar experienced a language barrier during her counseling sessions that limited the expression of her feelings. Perhaps others who share Om Manar's language concerns see this barrier as insurmountable, and would choose not to seek counseling even if they received a referral. This finding aligned with that of existing research that implied international students underuse counseling services and therefore alternative methods should be researched in order to assist these students. Moreover, this study presented a unique look at adjustment which, beyond the initial adjustment period to life in the US, has largely been ignored in the existing literature.

Implications for Practice

This research study examined the experiences of five international students affected by home country crises at two institutions in the US. Their experiences are at the same time unique and similar to one another. To the best of my ability, I have attempted to illustrate the stories of these students as told in their own voices. The following implications for practice developed out of analyzing the data from these participants. It should be noted that although these implications arose from conversations with mainly international graduate students, some can be applied to the international student population as a whole.

Assist students with contacting home. International students at Sunny State University and the University of the Rivers placed a high amount of importance on family and the idea of home. For several of these students, what mattered most was maintaining the safety of family in the home country. Perhaps the best way to help students relieve stress is to help them find ways to contact home.

Be cognizant of language. News and other information sources can exaggerate and sensationalize news in order to reach a wider audience. Sometimes these broadcasts can feel like a dramatic film from which we can easily detach. For international students coming from countries in crisis, though, sensationalized reports about their home countries represent much more than a dramatized version of the truth. The videos playing out in front of their eyes are very real for them. Professionals in higher education should be aware of students' personal connections to crises and be cognizant of the language they use to address these students. Extensive knowledge of current events will not always be perceived as concern for the students or their families. However, it is

important that professionals who wish to help international students affected by crises reach out to the students in sensitive ways to ask the students what they need, rather than approaching all students in the same manner.

Assist students with seeking out trustworthy information sources.

Sometimes, the nature of the crisis may necessitate reliance on untrustworthy information sources. However, some students found that removing social media and broadcast media sources from their information seeking behavior helped them to recover from the stress caused by the crisis. Professionals should be aware of the damage that sensational news can cause and try to help students overcome reliance on these sources. Be advised, though, that avoiding broadcast and social media may not be an option for some students if they have no other way of obtaining information. In addition, untrustworthy sources of information are not the cause of all stress reactions, so blocking these sources cannot solve all problems for students affected by crises.

Develop alternatives to counseling. Both previous literature and the findings from this study show that international students underuse counseling services on campus. Although more referrals should be made for students affected by crisis and counseling center staff should receive more diversity training to help prepare them for working with this population, counseling should not be the only option. Many students will choose not to use such services even when referred, and prefer to seek help from peers and other support networks. Professionals should seek out alternative options to traditional counseling to create a supportive campus.

Many international students use the internet extensively to research the events occurring in their home countries and to stay in contact with family and friends.

Professionals can take advantage of international students' information seeking habits by creating resources and materials that are easily accessed online. Use social media, infographics, guidebooks, and websites to reach students in crisis and provide them with suggestions on ways to cope and ways to find support during these times. Invite those who have experienced crises to speak out online and tell their stories. This could create a peer forum where students could feel acknowledged and help them understand that they are not alone.

Develop support systems before a crisis occurs. Each international student who participated in this research made use of support networks, both in their home countries and in the US. For some, establishing a trustworthy support network in the US took time. However, some students may arrive in the midst of a crisis and be in immediate need of support in a new place where they have no knowledge of the resources available to them and have not yet created networks upon which to rely. Professionals in higher education, therefore, should take a proactive approach to building ready-made support networks at the host institution before a crisis occurs. It is insufficient to rely upon large numbers of fellow nationals to take in newcomers, because even those students from countries largely represented at an institution may feel alone and invisible. Consider providing host families, peer counselors, buddy programs, and other social activities geared toward helping new students form connections upon arrival at the institution. In addition, professionals should work toward building relationships with their students so that if a crisis occurs, that student would feel comfortable seeking support from that individual.

There is much more to learn from the stories and experiences of the international students from Sunny State University and the University of the Rivers. Home country

crises affected their lives in a variety of different ways, dependent on the type of event, the connections to the home and host country, the personality of the individual, and a multitude of other factors. There can be no guidebook that explains exactly what we should do in the event of a crisis as one can never fully prepare for every future war, financial crisis, terrorist attack, or natural disaster. More research should be done to attempt to understand the experiences of international students affected by home country crises so that we may be better equipped to respond to student needs in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on international students affected by home country crises is extremely limited. Because so little about this phenomenon has been explored, the avenues for future research are nearly limitless. More qualitative studies that seek to discover the rich, detailed experiences of international students affected by crises should be conducted. Perhaps researchers of similar cultural backgrounds to participants could choose to conduct interviews in the native language so as to glean an even deeper understanding of the experience of crisis. This study chose to interview five students from five different countries experiencing five different crises. An interesting avenue to take would be to explore the experiences of two students from the same country affected by the same crisis to see how their experiences differ. In addition, a study that compared the experiences of international students on two opposing sides of a crisis could also be enlightening for the field, as professionals may encounter many different perspectives when a crisis occurs that is political in nature. For example, how might a Russian student's experience be different from Anna's experience with the crisis in Ukraine in this study? How might it be the same?

Although this study focused on large-scale crises, other studies might focus on the experiences and needs of students affected by more personal traumas. Longitudinal studies that explore the effects of a crisis over a long period of time could be especially beneficial. Given that many conflicts last for several years or even decades, a longitudinal study could reveal how the experiences of a student or group of students change over time. Quantitative studies could be used to measure larger populations of international students across the US who are affected by crises at home. In addition, more studies that use scales to measure stress reactions in international students could help healthcare providers and others prepare for student needs when a crisis develops.

Some interesting minor themes arose out of the analysis of data in this study. One that merits more research is the concept of international student identity development during times of crisis. Some of the students in this study presented signs of disassociation from their home culture and the adoption of host culture attributes. The recognition and development of this altered identity has received some focus in the field from researchers such as Eunyoung Kim (2012), however it has yet to be explored in depth. This study confirmed the need for such exploration into international student identity theories.

Conclusion

This study sought to gain insight into the experiences of international students affected by a home country crisis. As the participants of this study shared with me their stories of experiencing crises occurring on four different continents from their apartments and residence halls in the US, I became increasingly aware of the complexity of each story. I realized that as much as these students might tell me about their experiences, I

can never truly know what it is like to be a Ukrainian, Libyan, Brazilian, Iraqi, or Filipino far from home when a crisis occurs. Even so, their stories indicate that there is much to be learned by administrators in higher education. The international students in this study showed impressive bravery and resilience as they faced challenges that many of us will never experience.

As one of the first qualitative studies to explore this phenomenon, this study made contributions to the literature in various ways. The findings showed how comments about a crisis caused unintended harm for some students, what information seeking strategies students used during times of crisis, and how different factors influenced the perception of support. This study also provided a fresh look at the coping process as a continuous undertaking for students who are affected by crises in their home countries. If higher education administrators intend to support and retain these international students, they must be prepared to closely examine their own practices and develop new strategies. Administrators may need to restructure support systems currently in place at their institutions in order to better serve this population. Moreover, researchers must continue to examine the realities of international students affected by home country crises so that those in the field of international education may adapt to the support needs of their students effectively and efficiently. Although these international students have remained a quiet minority on college campuses in the US, their numbers are growing and they bring with them the distinct message that even if they do not require assistance, they still wish to be acknowledged.

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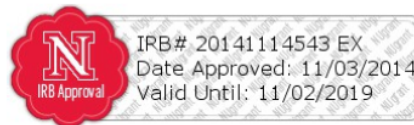
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Appendix A

Informed Consent Document



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Educational Administration

Informed Consent Document

Exploring the reactions and needs of international students studying at U.S. institutions while large-scale crises occur in their home countries.

This is a research project that focuses on the experiences of international students who have been affected by a large-scale crisis in their home country(s) such as a natural disaster, war, epidemic, genocide, economic crisis, political or civil unrest, or mass terrorism while studying in the U.S. In order to participate you must be 19 years of age or older. You must have been physically present in the U.S. during the crisis.

Participation in this study will require approximately three hours total. You will be asked to complete two one-hour interviews and a shorter follow-up interview for clarification purposes that may last up to an additional hour. You will be given the questions for the interviews ahead of time along with this document. Interviews will be conducted in English. Participation will take place via Skype, Google Hangout, or another similar video chat service. If you choose to prepare for the interviews in a written manner, you will be asked if you would like to provide copies of those materials to aid the research process.

Participants may experience some discomfort discussing traumatic memories, but there are no other known risks associated with this research.

The results of this study will be used to add real voices and stories to the literature. This research may influence how crises involving international students are handled at institutions in the future and may lead to a more efficient and knowledgeable approach to meeting the needs of students in similar situations.


Your participation in this research study will be kept confidential. Any information that you or the researcher believe may lead to your identification will be removed from the data. Audio tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a private location behind a locked door. You may choose to have the recording turned off at any point during the interviews.

You may ask questions concerning this research at any time by contacting Caitlin McVay at +1 [REDACTED]. You may also contact her advisor Stephanie Bondi at [REDACTED]. If you would like to speak to someone else, please call the Research Compliance Services Office at [REDACTED] or send an email to [REDACTED].

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or your institution, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please keep a copy of this document for your records.

Appendix B

Introductory Survey



Exploring the reactions and needs of international students studying at U.S. institutions while large-scale crises occur in their home countries.

Caitlin McVay is conducting a research study that focuses on the experiences of international students who have been affected by a large-scale crisis in their home country(s) such as a natural disaster, war, epidemic, genocide, economic results of this survey will be used to determine whether you qualify for the study. By submitting your answers you are voluntarily choosing to participate in this survey. If you have any questions, please contact the researcher at [REDACTED]. You may also contact her advisor Stephanie Bondi at [REDACTED].

* Required

Please list your email address. *

Are you age 19 or older? *

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please describe the crisis or traumatic event that affected you in 10 words or less.

ex: 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict, 2013 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, etc.

Where did the crisis or traumatic event occur?

☐ In my home country

☐ In the U.S.

☐ Other:

When the crisis or traumatic event happened, where were you?

☐ In my home country

☐ In the U.S.

☐ Other:

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Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Exploring the reactions and needs of international students studying at U.S. institutions while large-scale crises occur in their home countries.

Is it okay if I record this interview? You may ask me to stop the recording at any time. (If yes, turn on recording.) My name is Caitlin McVay and I am a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am conducting a research study on the experiences of international students who have been affected by a large-scale crisis in their home country(s) while studying in the U.S. You should have received a copy of the Informed Consent Document by email. Do you have any questions? (Answer any questions they may have.) You may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. By agreeing verbally, you are voluntarily making a decision whether to participate in this research study. Do you wish to participate? (If yes, continue with interview.)

First Interview Questions:

1. What country are you from?
2. What major event occurred in your country while you were studying in the U.S.?
3. How long had you been in the U.S. when the event occurred?
4. How was your country affected by the event that occurred?
5. How were your community, friends, and family in your country affected?
6. Tell me about the day that you heard about the event. Where were you, what were you doing, how did you hear about the event?
7. How did you react to the event?

8. In what way do you think your reactions would have been different if you were in your home country when the event occurred?
9. What feelings did you have immediately after the event? In what ways did these feelings change over the next few days, weeks, and months?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Second Interview Questions:

1. How were your day to day routines changed after hearing about the event?
2. How were your relationships in the U.S. affected? (friends, professors, university, community)
3. How were your relationships in your home country affected?
4. How aware do you think Americans and international students from other countries were of the event?
5. What type(s) of support, if any, did you receive from the university?
6. What other kinds of support, if any, did you receive after the event beyond the university? (friends, community, counseling services)
7. Please describe any service or assistance that you wish had been available to you during this event.
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Follow-up Interview Questions:

1. Is there anything else you want to tell me that will help me understand your experiences?
2. Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to in the first two interviews?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation.